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# PROG

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**JETHRO TULL**
YES
**HAWKWIND**
THE TANGENT
**TRIFECTA**
OLIVER WAKEMAN
**SIX BY SIX**
WHOM GODS DESTROY

HOW RED BROUGHT THE CURTAIN DOWN ON THE 70s

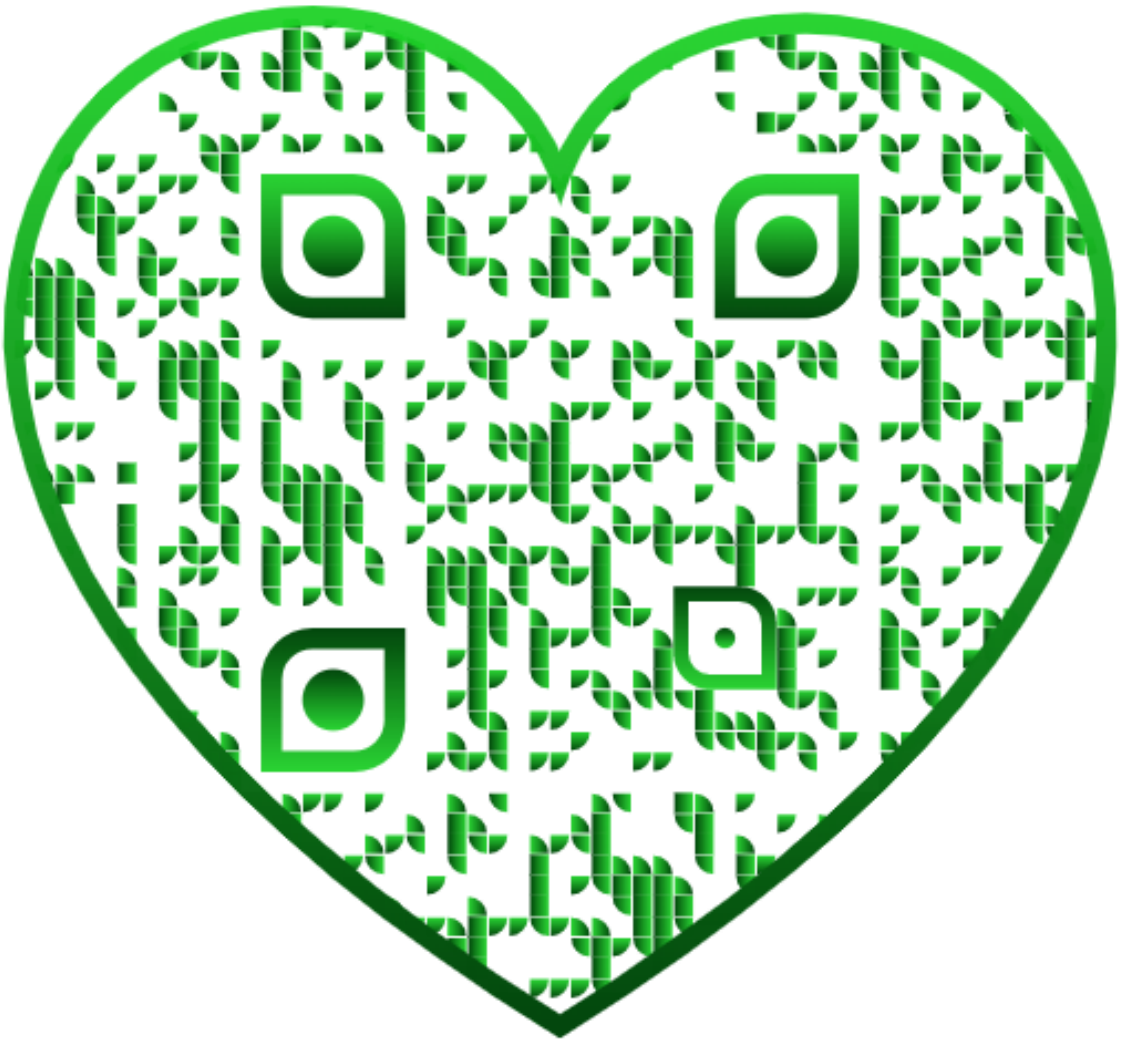
# KING CRIMSON

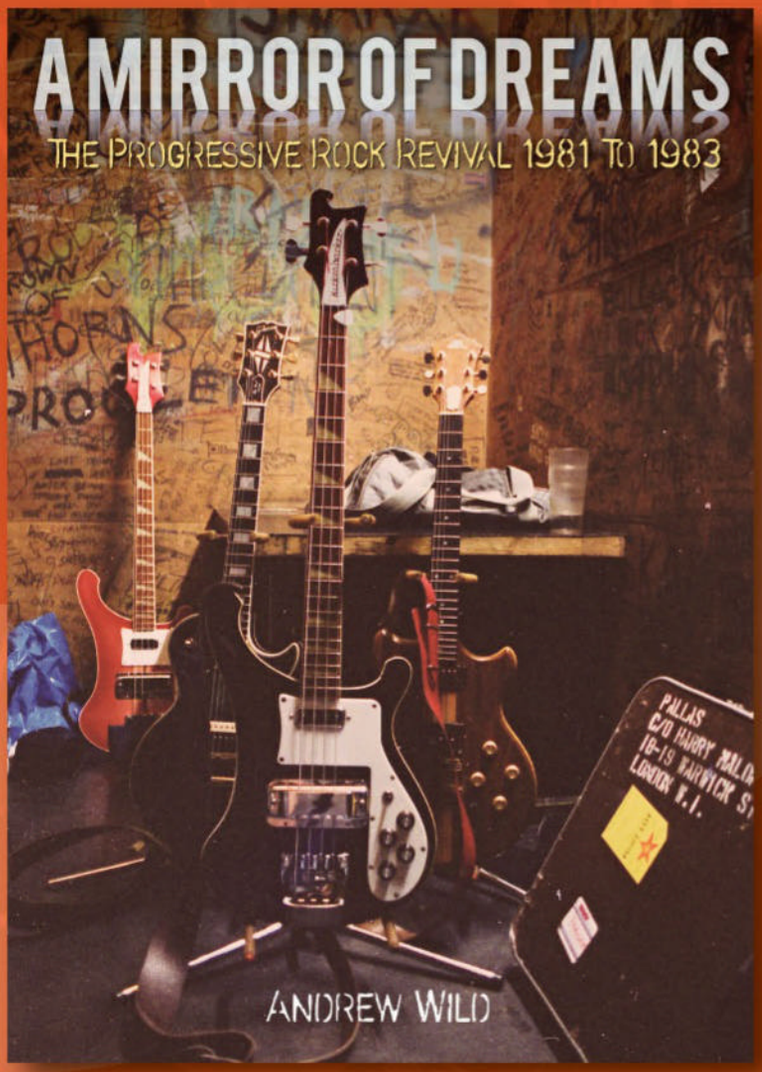
"Giving birth to the thing was rough work"

**BEAT**
BELEW AND LEVIN OPEN UP ON NEW 80s CRIMSON OUTFIT

FUTURE
PROG 150

**ANTHONY PHILLIPS**
"WHEN GENESIS GANGED UP ON PETE, TONY WAS AT THE FOREFRONT"



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# Contents

ISSUE 150 17.05.24

IF IT'S IN THERE IT'S ON HERE

M. DELESSIO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

COVER FEATURE

## King Crimson p28

The inside story of 1974's *Red*, King Crimson's last hurrah of the 70s…

# Contents

## REGULARS


**PROG PRESENTS...** pg 7
Get your fantastic free 16-track Solstice downloadable sampler here.

**BLOODY WELL WRITE** pg 10
Missives, musings and tweets from Planet Prog.

**THE INTRO** pg 12
Asia return with a brand-new line-up and North American tour, plus all the latest news from Haken, Focus, Azure, Soundle Festival, Justin Hayward, Hasse Fröberg and more!

**Q&A** pg 26
Vocalist Charlie Bramald updates us on new band Age Of Distraction, Ghost Of The Machine and more.

**THE PROG INTERVIEW** pg 76

PRESS/AL STUART
Anthony Phillips, original Genesis guitarist, recalls the band and his career since departing.

**THE MUSICAL BOX** pg 82
The new reissue of *Talk* by Yes takes top billing and we review the latest releases from Pink Floyd, Steve Hackett, Colosseum, The Tangent, Eivør, Bass Communion, Jon Anderson, Dave Foster Band, Edgar Broughton Band, Jean-Luc Ponty, Nektar, Maybeshewill, Tarja, Anthony Phillips, The Omnific, Nordic Giants, Brian Auger and loads more…

**TAKE A BOW** pg 100
This issue we went to Winter's End Festival and saw gigs by Jethro Tull, Hawkwind, Kyros, Zombi, John Mitchell and more.

**MY PROG** pg 114
Crown Lands' Kevin Comeau on a prog world full of Rush, Yes and a great cup of coffee.


## FEATURES


**BEAT** Pg 40
Messrs Belew, Levin, Carey and Vai resurrect the 80s King Crimson.

**Oliver Wakeman** Pg 44
Wakeman Jr takes a voyage through the seas of celtic prog on *Anam Cara*.

**Hawkwind** Pg 48

PRESS/DALE CHERRY
Dave Brock shakes off a nasty bout of Covid to tell us all about Hawkwind's *Stories From Time And Space*.

**Sleepmakeswaves** Pg 52
Aussie post-rock trio on having fun with riffs and adding the odd vocal here and there on their latest album.

**The Tangent** Pg 56
Andy Tillison proves himself to be a lone star on new release *To Follow Polaris*.

**Wheel** Pg 60
The Anglo-Finnish prog metallers find themselves on album number three.

**Trifecta** Pg 64
Nick Beggs, Craig Blundell and Adam Holzman return with more prog fusion.

**Six By Six** Pg 68
The prog-rock supergroup are back with their second album, *Beyond Shadowland*.

**Whom Gods Destroy** Pg 72
Dream Theater? Never heard of 'em! Ex-Sons Of Apollo men give prog metal a proper shake up with their new band.

# the tangent for one

## To Follow Polaris

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***Feedback '86*** *is a collection of songs originally written in 1986, and it features appearances from* ***Brian May*** *(Queen),* **Bonnie Tyler**, ***Chris Thompson*** *(Manfred Mann's Earth Band), as well as Marillion members* ***Ian Mosley*** *&* ***Pete Trewavas****.*

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# PROG PRESENTS...

# Discovering

A story that began at the legendary Marquee Club in London's Wardour Street has finally arrived at the chapter where *Prog* writer Martin Kielty describes Solstice as "the band they were always meant to be".

With the beguiling presence of vocalist Jess Holland, Solstice are *the* band to catch live this year. A string of high-profile festival appearances from Glastonbury to Milan and a show-stopping performance

PRESS/LAURENT VEIGNAL

Solstice: lighting up this issue's sampler.

to 20,000 people at Cropredy Festival confirm the band's journey moves ever onwards. Current album *Light Up*, released in January 2023, continues the upward trajectory bringing their music to an ever-growing audience.

Scan here to download or follow the instructions on the right

Loved by luminaries including Steven Wilson and Greg Spawton of Big Big Train, Solstice are a band you'll never find in the mainstream, yet their music continues to enthral fans old and new.

## What's on your free Solstice digital album

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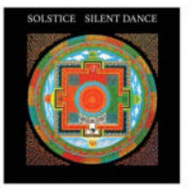
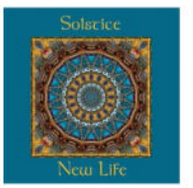
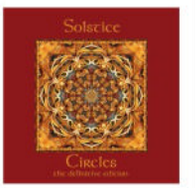


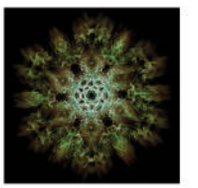

**1 *Find Yourself (Steven Wilson Remix)***
Taken from *Silent Dance*




**2 *Journey***
Taken from *New Life*



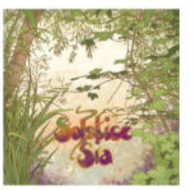

**3 *Sacred Run***
Taken from *Circles*



**4 *Solomon's Bridge***
Taken from *Spirit*

**5 *Flight (Live)***
Taken from *Kindred Spirits*

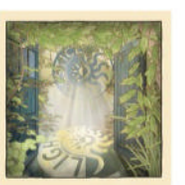
**6 *Warriors***
Taken from *Prophecy*



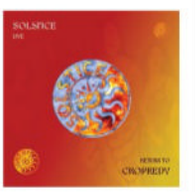
**7 *A New Day***
Taken from *Sia*

**8 *Seven Dreams***
Taken from *Sia*

**9 *Shout***
Taken from *Live In Veruno*



**10 *Light Up***
Taken from *Light Up*




**11 *Firefly***
Taken from *Return To Cropredy*

**12 *Guardian***
Taken from *The Stables Live*

**13 *Bulbul Tarang***
Taken from *The Stables Live*

**14 *Wongle No9***
Taken from *The Stables Live*

**15 *Sacred Run***
Taken from *The Stables Live*

**16 *Morning Light***
Taken from *Live At MK11*

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# Ed's Letter

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Hello and welcome to the latest issue of *Prog*. So then, issue 150! And little over 15 years since we launched this title back in 2009. Some of you have been with us since that very first issue with Pink Floyd on the front cover; some have joined in along the way. And I have to say that without you, the readers, none of this would have been possible. Along with the musicians who create this wonderful music that we write about, I say a hearty thank you from the team and myself, while not forgetting all those who have worked with us along the way to bring you *Prog* magazine. We dedicate this issue to all of you.

It's King Crimson's barnstorming 1974 album *Red* that graces the cover, as Sid Smith tells the story of how the band went from creating one of their very finest records to imploding within a year. On top of that we speak to BEAT, the new 80s Crimson outfit, ahead of their much anticipated US tour; Anthony Phillips recalls his time in Genesis and beyond; and Dave Brock tells us all about the new Hawkwind album.

Plus The Tangent, Oliver Wakeman, Trifecta, Six By Six, Whom Gods Destroy, Wheel, Age Of Distraction and more bring us up to speed with their latest releases. Also in this issue, we review the brand-new reissue of Yes's *Talk* album and catch Jethro Tull and loads more live.

The re-energised Solstice bring us this month's free downloadable music sampler – which I've really been enjoying listening to as we put this issue together – and we've dug out some of our favourite *Prog* covers from the last 15 years for our free postcards. Plenty to celebrate, then.

What a great ride it's been so far. Here's to many more issues and thank you once again for all your support.

As always, do take care. And prog on. And on. And on...

**Jerry Ewing – Editor**

NEXT ISSUE June 21 ON SALE

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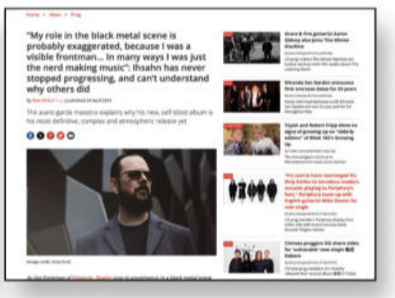

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# Bloody Well Write

Send your letters to us at: *Prog*, Future Publishing, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London, W2 6QA, or email prog@futurenet.com. Letters may be edited for length. We regret that we cannot reply to phone calls and we cannot always respond to individual messages. Find us on facebook.com under *Prog*.

## HAPPIEST OF BIRTHDAYS!

Hard to believe it's been 15 years since *Prog* magazine launched. I've been a reader since the first issue was unleashed with 'Pink Floyd & The Gods of Prog'. Progressive rock is a music that'll never, ever go away.

Nearly 20 years ago, I discovered bands online ranging from Magma, Van der Graaf Generator, Premiata Forneria Marconi, Banco del Mutuo Soccorso, Le Orme, Hawkwind and Marillion. It was basically like finding rare items that were often under the radar and never got played on the classic rock radio stations.

So once the first issue of *Prog* came around, I became aware of bands like Blood Ceremony and Astra from the Rise Above label; it proved that the genre had resurrected in the beginning of the 2010s. And one of the artists I really championed of course is Purson's Rosalie Cunningham.

Frank Zappa once said, "Jazz isn't dead, it just smells funny." It's the same thing with progressive rock music. I remember some of the samplers that my mom would get me for Christmas and Hanukkah, ranging from *Time Machine: A Vertigo Retrospective*, *Spirit Of Joy: Tales From The Polydor Underground*, *Strangely Strange But Oddly Normal: An Island Anthology*, and *Refugees: A Charisma Records Anthology*. It was [about] going beyond the big names from Genesis, King Crimson, ELP and Yes.

I don't know how many issues of *Prog* I have, but, man, do I have a lot. It's very much like reading a comic book, whether it's the DC or Marvel universe, to see what happens in the next story.

When I went through the magazines [in storage] a few days after my mom passed in 2021, I nearly wept. It showed how much she knew I loved reading *Prog*. Even though I love the big names that you've mentioned for 15 years, the little guy needs support. No matter what. And whenever I would read an issue between the years 2010, 2014, 2016, or 2019, it's like seeing an old friend you haven't seen for a very long, long time.

And I just want to say thank you for keeping the engines running. And in the words of Babe Ruth from the movie *The Sandlot*, "Heroes get remembered, but legends never die. Follow your heart kid, and you'll never go wrong."

***Zachary Nathanson, via email (USA)***

*Thank you, Zachary, for sharing such personal and powerful memories. Here's to many more years of progressive music in all its shapes, sounds and smells! —Dep. Ed.*

**Our very first issue, from 2009.**

ZACHARY NATHANSON

**Highlights from reader Zachary Nathanson's *Prog* collection.**

**Wouldn't a new Gentle Giant album be wonderful? We can dream!**

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

## A BUMPER MAG FOR FOLKS OF ALL PROGRESSIVE TASTES!

Goodness me, I'm well and truly over the moon! *Prog* 149 was one of the best editions for, well, years (although *Prog* 148 was pretty good, too: Tangerine Dream, finally!). Anyway, returning to *Prog* 149, it pressed all the right buttons for me, personally. Gentle Giant were the very first band I saw live (Chatham, in the early 70s), VdGG one of my fave bands of all time, *Pawn Hearts* being among my all-time favourite albums.

Hang on, it gets better. A full-page review dedicated to the new Hawkwind album, which is the best in a very long time. Followed by a perfect description of the new A Burial At Sea album, which I bought a few weeks ago. And finally an interview with Midas Fall, their album I bought on release day on both CD and (coloured) vinyl. I absolutely love it and after all the years I have personally spent buying albums (since 1967, btw) it has to be added to my all-time favourite albums. So I was pleased to see them in *Prog*.

However there's one thing which puzzles me relating to the Midas Fall record, having revisited your album reviews over the past couple of issues. I can't find a review related to this album, or have I missed it?

***Alan A, via email***

*Thanks for your email, Alan, we're delighted to read that you've enjoyed the last few issues of Prog so much. Our review of Midas Fall's Cold Waves Divide Us appeared in Prog 147 — the issue with Steve Hackett on the cover. If you missed out, there are a few copies still available on the Magazines Direct website — see bit.ly/buyprogmag. To ensure you don't miss another copy of your favourite publication, turn to p112 and also take advantage of our latest subscription offer. — Dep. Ed.*

## IN SEARCH OF THE REAL MISSING PIECE

With the recently released Steven Wilson remix of a classic Gentle Giant album (*The Missing Piece*), it is likely that some wealthy older fans will pay for another copy of a record that they already own or once owned. How much better it would be if the surviving members of this great band were to create a completely new work for the 21st century, with the deliberate intention of making it as clever and complex as possible? Those threatening punks are long gone. Derek Shulman could write lyrics and maybe the main melodies, and Kerry Minnear could go to town on composition and

# LETTER

I just want to give a shout-out to the wonderful 'It's Prog Jim…' column, my first port of call when reading the magazine.

In the last few months the likes of Jeremy Allen and Phil Weller have made compelling cases for albums from the likes of Coldplay, Portishead [see above], Tears For Fears and even Secret Affair to be considered as part of the prog canon.

While I don't agree with many of their selections, they do make great starting points for discussions with my fellow proggy hounds, and to paraphrase Voltaire, "I defend their right to say it." Recently I even had to raid my daughter's CD collection to listen to *Viva La Vida*!

Keep up the good work guys; a great and thought-provoking column.

***Nigel Banks, Leeds***

*Thanks for your email, Nigel. We hope you continue to enjoy discovering new music through Prog — Dep. Ed.*

*This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag from burningshed.com*

arrangements. Gary Green and one of the two drummers (or both?) could then work on the material in their inimitable fashion. If a bass player is required, I would suggest Roger Carey, who played in Gary's band Three Friends for a while. Roger lives near me, and is currently in Steeleye Span, but I have not talked to him about this idea.

If a new album was released (ideally distributed through Burning Shed), there would be much excitement among Gentle Giant fans. Most older prog fans see nothing wrong with actually paying for music, so sales could be considerable. If a record label is needed, obviously Derek has contacts from his A&R days, or InsideOutMusic might be interested.

In my view, a new record and some media interviews would be enough. What a prospect a new GG album would be, before we all shuffle off our mortal coils.

***Barry Power, St Leonards-on-Sea***

*Thanks for your email, Barry, and what a wonderful thought! Do any of our other readers have a dream-team reformation they'd like to witness? You can find out contact details at the top of this page. — Dep. Ed.*

## REMEMBERING MIKE PINDER

Remembering the Moodies' original keyboard player, Mike Pinder, who passed away at the age of 82. Mike's innovative use of the Mellotron, starting with 1967's *Days Of Future Passed*, brought them their signature sound. His songwriting was also a vital element of their progressive identity. I've had the 1974 compilation *This Is The Moody Blues* in my collection since the mid-70s, and it's a great cross-section of the band's 1967-1973 catalogue. Listening now really does take me back. Thanks for the music, Mike.

***Steve Perry, via Facebook***

## ALL ABOARD THE HAWKSHIP

On April 4, I along with many others were honoured to see Hawkwind at Manchester Academy. The news that Dave Brock's health was not good will have been of a concern to many — but we needn't have worried. Yes, there was a chair onstage for Dave to have periodical rests, but that did not deter from the performance, with Captain Dave and his merry men playing an amazing set. Of course, time will catch up on us all, and come the day that Dave feels that he is not up to touring anymore (may that not be too soon), then I am sure that the band can continue under the helm of Magnus Martin.

Another mention needs to go to the wonderful Solstice for a fantastic support slot. Having listened to Solstice for a number of years, this was my first opportunity to see them live, and they definitely did not disappoint. If you get the chance, please see Solstice live. I will definitely be going again.

***Jonathan Worthington, via email***

*Thanks for your message, Jonathan. Now turn to p7 for our exclusive Solstice digital sampler and p100 for our live reviews section, where you can find coverage of Hawkwind's Newcastle show and Solstice at Winter's End Festival in Chepstow. We hope you enjoy! — Dep. Ed.*

## THE BIG TOP

He's always been a releaser of consistently good and very good albums, but I never thought Steve Hackett would reach the levels of my personal favourites of *Spectral Mornings* and *Please Don't Touch*. However, with his newie, *The Circus And The Nightwhale*, he's certainly come close. It's excellent.

Steve Hackett has shown many times how good an acoustic guitarist he is (prog's best?), but on this album he really shines on electric, too. Much more than he's ever done before.

This album will be high on most people's lists of prog album of the year.

***Alan Royes, via Facebook***

## PROGRESSIVE GUITAR HEROES

How about a vote for best prog rock guitar solo of all time? Not very original or creative I know, but would be great fun with those dark and cold summer months coming on… only the highest-scoring two from each band will qualify, so it isn't a Petrucci vs Gilmour love-in!

***Paul Spence, via email***

*An interesting suggestion, Paul, and certainly one to consider for a future issue! — Dep. Ed.*


PROG

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# INTRO

IF IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S IN HERE

# THE HEAT GOES ON AS ASIA RETURN AGAIN

Led by Geoff Downes, the latest incarnation will hit the road in the USA and Canada in July. Could new material be on the way?

**Yes keyboard player** Geoff Downes has teamed up with Lonely Robot's John Mitchell, Planet X drummer Virgil Donati and singer Harry Whitley for a new version of Asia inspired by the same line-up's performance at last year's John Wetton memorial concert.

"The reaction was just incredible, not just from the audience on the night, but also the people who were streaming it at home," marvels Downes. "People seemed so impressed by what we were doing and it really made a big impact on me. And that kickstarted an idea: I decided it would be great to take Asia back out on the road and do it all again."

True to his word, the new-look line-up headline the Heat Of The Moment Tour, which will take in North America and Canada this July. Named after the monster hit from Asia's self-titled 1982 debut, the dates carry a certain symmetry for Downes.

"A lot of time has gone by since that first album," he says. "But I think there's a natural cycle to it, especially with me having discovered Harry. He's not emulating John Wetton as such, but he's always been a big fan of Asia and his voice is very similar."

Classically trained Whitley first caught Downes' attention through his YouTube channel, where he would upload his uncanny Asia covers.

"Harry would tell me how my music was a big influence on him, so I thought I'd check him out," says Downes. "I was really blown away by his attention to detail, particularly his vocal intonation. He did a version of *Heroine* [from 2008's *Phoenix*] where he managed to get all these twists and turns that I thought only John was ever capable of. To hear Harry do that was really scary and quite chilling, because John's voice could bring people to tears. So I got in touch with him when the tribute show was coming together. I thought, 'If anyone's going to put their stamp on these songs, here's the man for the job.'"

While guitarist Mitchell has history with both Wetton and Downes (appearing on the duo's *Icon* project), Virgil Donati completes Asia's new iteration. The drummer is perhaps best known for Planet X, though he was

Remembrance Day: the roots of Asia's new look go back to 2023's John Wetton tribute concert.

> **"We're putting together a show that's hopefully going to be action-packed."**

also a latter-day member of Wetton's prog supergroup, UK. Downes sees him as a perfect replacement for Carl Palmer, who's otherwise busy with his ELP Legacy project.

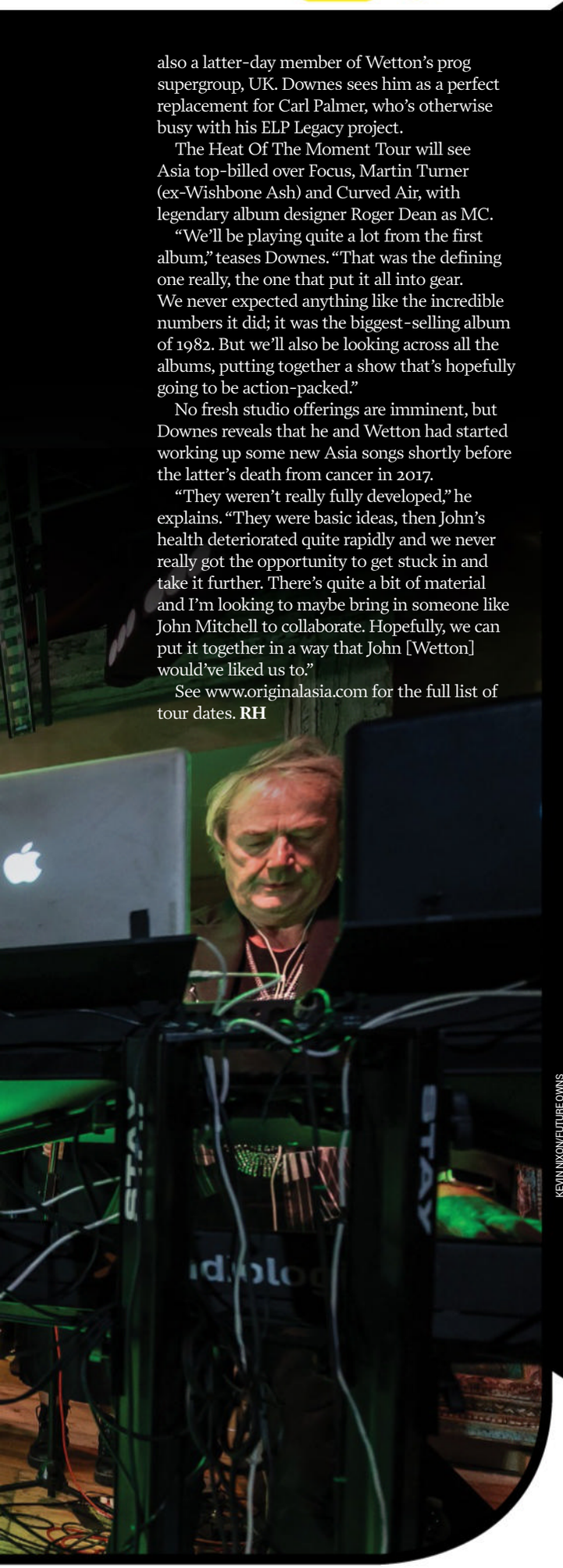
The Heat Of The Moment Tour will see Asia top-billed over Focus, Martin Turner (ex-Wishbone Ash) and Curved Air, with legendary album designer Roger Dean as MC.

"We'll be playing quite a lot from the first album," teases Downes. "That was the defining one really, the one that put it all into gear. We never expected anything like the incredible numbers it did; it was the biggest-selling album of 1982. But we'll also be looking across all the albums, putting together a show that's hopefully going to be action-packed."

No fresh studio offerings are imminent, but Downes reveals that he and Wetton had started working up some new Asia songs shortly before the latter's death from cancer in 2017.

"They weren't really fully developed," he explains. "They were basic ideas, then John's health deteriorated quite rapidly and we never really got the opportunity to get stuck in and take it further. There's quite a bit of material and I'm looking to maybe bring in someone like John Mitchell to collaborate. Hopefully, we can put it together in a way that John [Wetton] would've liked us to."

See www.originalasia.com for the full list of tour dates. **RH**



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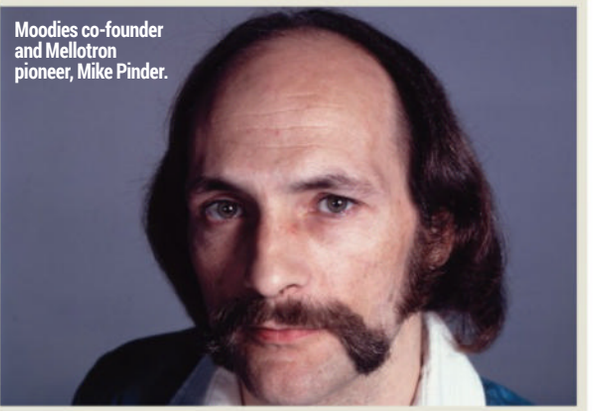
# MOODY BLUES' MIKE PINDER DEAD AT 82

## The keyboard player was the last surviving member of the original band.



Moodies co-founder and Mellotron pioneer, Mike Pinder.

PRESS/MOODY BLUES

**Mike Pinder, one** of the founding members of The Moody Blues, has died at the age 82. His passing was confirmed by his family and fellow Moodies bandmate John Lodge.

Pinder had been the last surviving founding member of the band. Drummer Graeme Edge passed in 2021, vocalist and flautist Ray Thomas died in 2018, with original guitarist Denny Laine passing last year. Clint Warwick, the original bassist, died in 2004.

Lodge shared the news on his official Facebook page, and commented, "All the love possible goes out from the Lodge family to Mike's family today... RIP."

As well as the music he created with The Moody Blues, Pinder will also be remembered as an advocate of technology, notably his pioneering work with the Mellotron.

Pinder helped form The Moody Blues back in 1964 and they had an initial hit with *Go Now*, but it wasn't until 1967, by which time Justin Hayward and John Lodge had replaced Laine and Warwick respectively, that the band began to rise in popularity, shifting their sound from the early R'n'B roots to a more progressive and symphonic sound with their second album, *Days Of Future Passed*. He left the group in 1978 after recording their ninth album, *Octave*.

News of Mike Pinder's passing was announced at the time of going to press. A full appreciation of his life and work will appear in the next issue of *Prog*.

See www.moodybluestoday.com. **JE**

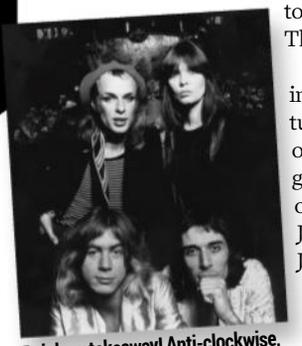
# 50TH ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE FOR CULT KEVIN AYERS SHOW

## June 1, 1974 gig and album marked by discussion and music.

**The 50th anniversary** of the sold-out gig at the Rainbow Theatre in Finsbury Park, London by the incredible line-up of Kevin Ayers of Soft Machine fame, former Velvet Underground members John Cale and Nico, and a newly solo Brian Eno, and the live album that it spawned – *June 1, 1974* – is to be the subject of a special celebration taking place at The Social in London on June 1.

Hosted by music writer Travis Elborough, the event includes a panel discussion featuring former journalist turned Island Records A&R Richard Williams, who organised and recorded the concert; Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera, who would later work with all of the headliners; former *Melody Maker* Editor Allan Jones; saxophonist John Altman and Nico biographer Jennifer Otter Bickerdike.

Musical entertainment will be provided by Limelight star Emma Tricca and former Hefner frontman Darren Hayman. See www.bit.ly/June1_tickets. **JM**



Rainbow takeaway! Anti-clockwise, from bottom left: Kevin Ayers, John Cale, Nico, Brian Eno.

GEMS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

# FOCUS ARE BACK WITH NEW MATERIAL

Leader Thijs Van Leer enthuses about the band's unity and quirky sense of humour.

No hang ups: Focus add mischievous humour to their new album.

PRESS/RAY STEENWIJK

**Dutch prog legends** return with *Focus 12* on July 5 via on Spirit Of Unicorn Music, coinciding with a month-long tour supporting Asia's Heat Of The Moment North American tour the same month. Released on vinyl, CD and digital platforms, it's their first studio set of new material since 2018's *Focus 11*

After *Focus 11*, the Amsterdam quartet, led by founding keyboardist and flute maestro Thijs Van Leer, alongside longtime drummer Pierre van der Linden, found their plans disrupted by the pandemic, but eventually reconvened to make one their most collaborative albums to date, with key input from the two younger band members, guitarist Menno Gootjes and bassist Udo Pannekeet.

"Menno, to me, is a guitar hero," says Van Leer. "He interprets every song so beautifully and so intensely. He's the co-producer of *Focus 12*, along with Udo, another virtuoso. They also wrote two of the songs on the new record."

He adds that his bandmates bring "so much musical passion", and enthuses "how beautiful life can be when a band plays so easily and so together."

This chemistry can be heard on lead single *Fjord Focus*, an upbeat, jazz-inflected affair generously decorated first with Van Leer's fluttering flute melodies, alongside an infectious guitar hook and some impressive soloing from Gootjes.

Also worth a look is the accompanying promo video, a surreal affair which perhaps confusingly, features neither fjords, the band Focus or the popular saloon car whose name the pun derives from, but instead sees a spacecraft stopping to refuel on a deserted part of Earth, where they find themselves falling for the charms of our humble planet.

"It's a little love story," says Van Leer. "And has nothing to do with the track title; that was just my little gag," he grins.

The slightly mischievous Focus sense of humour also appears to be at work on the second planned single, *Focus 13*.

"It follows on from the track *Focus 12*," he says, laughing.

Meanwhile, although Van Leer already has material written for the next album, on the band's recent UK dates, they elected to go way back in time by playing the whole of 1972's *Focus 3*, an experience that, for Van Leer, was a labour of love. But didn't he, at 75, find himself having to relearn the tracks after so long?

"No," he says with a chuckle. "They are in our hearts and in our fingers." **JS**

> **"How beautiful life can be when a band plays so easily and so together."**

*See www.focustheband.co.uk for more.*

## INTRO extras

### SUSANNA CHANGES DIRECTION

**Norwegian art-rocker** Susanna Wallumrød has announced that she will release her new studio album, *Meditations On Love* through her own SusannaSonata label on August 23. In contrast to the sparse arrangements that characterised her interpretations of the works of French poet Charles Baudelaire on albums such as *Elevation*, the new recording brings in a variety of orchestral instruments to add new colour to her music. For more see susannamagical.com.

Azure: investing their emotions for their first full concept album.

PRESS

# AZURE GO FULL BLOWN CONCEPTUAL

The Brighton-based quintet dig deep into themselves for their third album.

**Prog metallers Azure** have revealed the depth of emotional investment that has gone into their third album, *Fym*. Their first fully committed concept album is out on May 23 via Marquee Avalon.

"It was all a lot of work, but it was very joyful and emotionally involved," says guitarist Galen Stapley. "For every story, I had to completely put myself in that mindset. I tried to completely embody what was in that narrative and I think it helped."

Adds singer Christopher Sampson, "I had to dig deep for a lot of the takes. We were very connected to the story."

The album finds the titular Fym embarking on a dark journey collecting shards of an otherworldly weapon that may have sinister motives behind it.

"Prog is the main home of concept albums," says Sampson. "We've really held back until now before we fully committed and we wanted a good concept. We talked about it for a long time before we finally settled on what would really be the right vibe."

"It started off pretty simple but then we just spent weeks going over every detail of every story until we were completely happy with it," continues Stapley. "We then put all of our energies into making sure that every aspect of the album was delivered on."

They admit that the fantasy aspect helps them deal with real experiences. "You're still expressing these really powerful emotions, but you get to do it with a degree of abstraction."

See www.azurebandofficial.com. **JM**

# SOUNDLE WEEKEND MUSIC FESTIVAL 2024 IS GO

The Emerald Dawn and Solstice are confirmed to headline.

**Symphonic progressive rockers** The Emerald Dawn and prog veterans Solstice have been confirmed as the headliners for the Soundle Weekend Music Festival 2024. Having taken a year off after its inaugural event, which was held in the market town of Oundle, this year's festival takes place on June 1-2 at its new home of The Key Theatre in Peterborough.

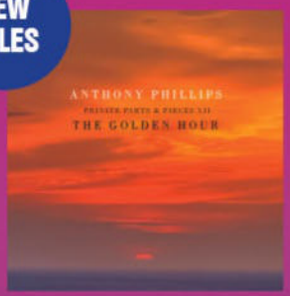
Joining the headliners across the two days are Scottish proggers Long Earth; Steve Hackett collaborator and singer-guitarist Amanda Lehmann; Ghost Of The Machine; The John Hackett Band, vocalist That Joe Payne; multi-instrumental duo The Blackheart Orchestra; folk-prog band Spriggan Mist; and Limelight stars The Beggs Sisters. And with the event taking place indoors, worries about potentially inclement weather will prove to be unnecessary.

Standard day tickets are priced at £59 while a two-day pass costs £99. For more see www.bit.ly/soundle_2024. **JM**

The Emerald Dawn: ready for Soundle.

PRESS/BRIAN PEACHEY

NEW TITLES

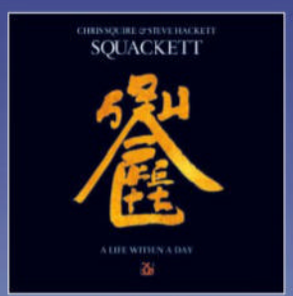



## ANTHONY PHILLIPS
### 'THE GOLDEN HOUR - PRIVATE PARTS AND PIECES XII'
(CD)

- The wonderful new volume in the 'Private Parts and Pieces' series by composer and Genesis founder member Anthony Phillips.
- Release Date 31st May 2024

## SON OF MAN
### 'GASLIGHT'
(CD)

- Fantastic new album by Son Of Man.
- Featuring former Man members George Jones and Bob Richards. This is the third album from the Son Of Man stable and follows its previously well received predecessors 'Son Of Man' and 'State Of Dystopia'.
- Release Date 26th April 2024



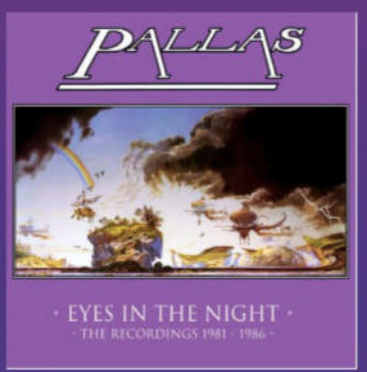

## SQUACKETT
### 'A LIFE WITHIN A DAY'
(CD/BLU-RAY EDITION)

- New CD and blu-ray edition of the classic album by Yes founder Chris Squire and celebrated solo artist and former Genesis member Steve Hackett.
- Featuring a blu-ray disc of the surround sound mix of the album.
- Release Date 31st May 2024

## AL STEWART
### 'PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE' 50TH ANNIVERSARY
(3CD/BLU-RAY LIMITED EDITION BOX SET)

- Deluxe 3CD / multi-region blu-ray disc 50th anniversary limited edition boxed set of the classic 1973 album by Al Stewart.
- Newly remastered and mixed from the original master tapes. Featuring an additional 30 bonus tracks drawn from Stephen W Tayler's new surround sound and stereo mixes of the album & a new mix of a concert recorded at the Howff in London in 1974.
- Release Date 28th June 2024

## PALLAS
### 'EYES IN THE NIGHT - THE RECORDINGS 1981 - 1986'
(6CD/BLU-RAY REMASTERED BOX SET)




- New official 4CD remastered clamshell box set featuring all of the surviving sessions by Pallas.
- A new 7 disc boxed set anthology with 6 CDs and 1 blu-ray video celebrating the music of neo prog band Pallas 1981 – 1986. Featuring the albums Arrive Alive, The Sentinel, The Wedge, singles and the 'Knightmoves' EP along with BBC recordings of the band's Reading Festival appearance in 1983 and a session for the Friday Rock Show in March 1984 and a CD of a previously unissued concert recorded at Ritzy's, Aberdeen in October 1985, as well as a blu-ray video disc (region free).
- Release Date 28th June 2024

## WARHORSE
### 'THE RECORDINGS - 1970-1972'
(2 CD)

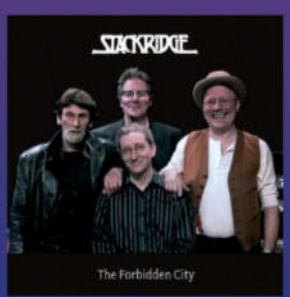
- New remastered 2CD set of the recordings by Warhorse released on the Vertigo label between 1970 and 1972.
- Featuring Deep Purple member Nick Simper. Includes the albums 'Warhorse' and 'Red Sea' and 11 additional bonus tracks.
- Includes an illustrated booklet with a new essay. Release
- Date 26th April 2024

## CARMEN
### 'THE ALBUMS 1973-1975'
(3CD BOXSET)

- New 3CD clamshell box set featuring all the albums recorded by the unique progressive rock band Carmen between 1973 and 1975.
- Featuring the albums 'Fandangos In Space', 'Dancing on a Cold Wind' and 'The Gypsies'. With an illustrated booklet featuring a new essay.
- Release Date 31st May 2024

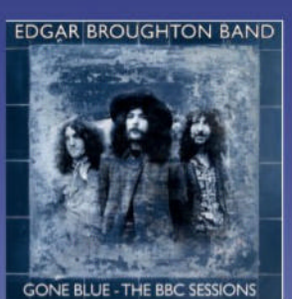
## RENAISSANCE
### 'TUSCANY'
(EXPANDED 3CD EDITION)

- New expanded 3CD edition of the 2001 album by Renaissance.
- Includes two bonus CDs of 'In The Land Of The Rising Sun – live in Japan 2001' with an illustrated booklet.
- Release Date 26th April 2024




## STACKRIDGE
### 'THE FORBIDDEN CITY - LIVE'
(2CD/DVD BOX SET EDITION)

- New 2CD and NTSC multi region DVD clamshell boxed set of the live album and DVD video by Stackridge filmed and recorded in 2007.
- With an illustrated booklet and essay.
- Release Date 26th April 2024




## EDGAR BROUGHTON BAND
### 'GONE BLUE - THE BBC SESSIONS'
(4CD BOX SET)

- New official 4CD remastered clamshell box set featuring all of the surviving sessions by the Edgar Broughton Band recorded for the BBC between 1969 and 1973.
- Featuring 32 previously unreleased tracks. All tracks newly remastered from the BBC masters. Includes an illustrated booklet with essay.
- Release Date 31st May 2024

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# HAKEN BRING EPIC SHOW BACK HOME

The prog metal band will play *Fauna* in full and a career-spanning set each night of tour.

Haken: going big for their UK and European tour.

PRESS/MAX TAYLOR GRANT

**Brits Haken will** bring their special 'An Evening With' shows to the UK and Europe this autumn. Having debuted the show concept in the USA earlier this year, they're set unleash their "indescribable and indulgent" extravaganza in some of the biggest venues they've ever headlined. The band will perform two sets each night — playing their latest album, *Fauna* in its entirety, followed by a career-spanning showcase.

Starting in Helsinki on September 4 and wrapping in Lyon 15 days later, the 18-date tour takes the band across 13 countries. There are also two UK dates, at The Ritz in Manchester (20) and London's O2 Forum Kentish Town (21).

*Fauna*, the band's seventh studio album, was released last year to critical acclaim and guitarist Charlie Griffiths believes its diversity makes it the ideal record to play in full on the tour.

"To me, *Fauna* is almost like an encapsulation of Haken up to this point," he says. "It touches on everything we've done previously and tightens it up. So it feels like a good representation of who we are, and it all makes for a really good show."

While Griffiths hints at some "special surprises" for the *Fauna* set's climax, he also points out that getting ready for "three hours of Haken riffs" was no easy feat.

"There's a lot to remember," he says. "We were prepping for months, so being onstage and being able to play all that music was the reward."

The band will play songs from each of their other six albums during the second set, with Griffiths revealing that the band have "been fine tuning the older songs. We've not played the *Aquarius* and *Visions* stuff for a long time, but we're not doing them note by note; there's a looseness that keeps things fresh and exciting."

He adds, "It was a case of picking the song that best represents each album, as well as being aware of what we played in Europe last time. There's been much discussion tweaking the setlist."

With an interval between the two sets, will be there be ice cream?

"It would be pretty spectacular if we did," Griffiths laughs. "I saw Dream Theater and they had ice cream. Failing that, sneak a Cornetto in your pocket. I did that for a Meshuggah show once and it was a great life experience!" **POW**

> **"*Fauna* feels like a good representation of who we are. It'll be a really good show."**

*See www.hakenmusic.com for full tour dates, tickets and more information.*

## INTRO extras

### MONO MAKE IT A DOZEN

**Japanese instrumental post-rockers** MONO return with *Oath*, their 12th full-length album, which is released via Pelagic on June 14. Recorded and mixed by longtime friend, collaborator and celebrated card player Steve Albini, the 11-track album is, according to the band, a deep meditation on the nature of existence across its 71-minute running time. For more see www.monoofjapan.com.

Here's looking at you, kid: HFMC ponder the influence of childhood on their new album.

PRESS

# HFMC WEIGH UP FATE AND FREEDOM

Hasse Fröberg asks the deep questions as the Swedish proggers unveil album five.

**For *Eternal Snapshots***, the fifth studio album from HFMC, out on June 6 via Glassville Records, singer and guitarist Hasse Fröberg was determined to stretch himself as a songwriter.

"I wanted to force myself to write lyrics in a new way," he says. "The album is a concept album in that I'm raising questions: what makes us who we are? Is everything predetermined or is everything a coincidence? What does our upbringing have to do with who we become?"

As he explored these themes, something unusual happened. "I could see two people in front of me – one that had a great childhood, happy upbringing, loving parents, and the other one had a rough childhood," he says. "I could picture them in a small town along the coast somewhere. I had them all figured out in my head. They became real after a while."

The other challenge that Fröberg set himself was to limit the music to what would fit on a single vinyl in a throwback to the classic albums of the past.

"Each side is 23 minutes, which is the maximum because after that the sound quality starts to sound crappier," he says.

Following a handful of festival dates over the summer, HFMC will play a special show in Uppsala, Sweden, on November 2 when they'll perform the new album from start to finish.

"We draw a pretty good crowd at home, so I'm very optimistic about that," says Fröberg.

For more, visit www.hfmcband.com. **DW**

# JUSTIN HAYWARD EXTENDS THE BLUE WORLD TOUR

Seven homecoming dates scheduled for October.

**Justin Hayward has** announced a run of seven additional UK dates this autumn as part of his ongoing The Blue World tour, which includes two shows in Scotland — his first dates north of the border in five years. Joining him on the tour are guitarist Mike Dawes, multi-instrumentalist and Moody Blues touring backing singer Julie Ragins and flautist Karmen Gould.

The former Moody Blues frontman and songwriter behind the classics *Nights In White Satin*, *Question* and *Tuesday Afternoon* will play Halifax Victoria Theatre (October 7), Dunfermline Alhambra Theatre (9), Aberdeen Music Hall (10), Darlington Hippodrome (13), New Brighton Floral Pavilion (14), Bexhill De La Warr Pavilion (16) and Tunbridge Wells Assembly Hall Theatre (17).

Speaking of the tour, Hayward said, "It's always a privilege and a joy to be invited to play in the UK. I enjoyed the dates in March so much that I couldn't wait to organise a return." See www.justinhayward.com. **JM**

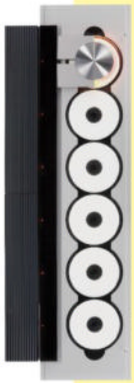
Forever autumn: October dates for Justin Hayward.

PRESS

# FAD GADGETS

**Rhodri Marsden** on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

### BANG & OLUFSEN BEOSYSTEM 9000C



Between 1996 and 2011, Danish high-end firm Bang & Olufsen produced the Beosound 9000, a beautiful (and expensive) six-CD changer, which you could mount on the wall and show off proudly to your guests. With the growing enthusiasm for physical media and distaste for streaming, they've decided to revive it. A limited number of 9000s are current being refurbished by the firm and integrated with a pair of new Beolab 28 speakers to create a super-retro, super-modern digital music system. I can't afford one, but I applaud it nonetheless.
**www.bang-olufsen.com**

### BLIPBLOX MYTRACKS

Growing up, the most advanced musical technology available to me was a battered four-track cassette recorder and a Yamaha Portasound keyboard. The new BlipBlox Mytracks, a fully-featured music production studio styled somewhere between a Fisher-Price toy and an Akai MPC, would have blown my teenage mind: it has a built-in microphone for sampling, two effects processors, 25 playpads to trigger a bunch of sounds, and a five-track recorder (crucially, that's one more than the four tracks I was restricted to). It's crowdfunding right now, shipping later this year.
**www.blipblox.com**

### LOOP SWITCH EARPLUGS

Recent years have seen a growing awareness of the importance of taking care of your hearing. This came a little late for me, annoyingly – decades of standing in deafening rehearsal rooms have taken some toll – but there are some very clever products out there which dial down the noise level while preserving much of the sonic fidelity. Loop Switch is my current favourite, and it's not too pricey, either; a little three-position slider on each ear lets more or less sound through as required. No batteries, no charging, just a marvel of acoustic engineering. Be kind to your ears, now.
**www.loopearplugs.com**

# MY PROG HERO

## Inspiring the wider music world...

ARUN NEVADER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

King of the universe: Kris Barras (inset) is hooked on Planet X guitarist Tony MacAlpine.

PRESS/DEAN CHALKLEY FOR EARACHE RECORDS

# KRIS BARRAS

Best known as the frontman and guitarist of the hard rocking and riffing Kris Barras Band, Barras loves prog metal supergroup **Planet X**.

**"It was their** guitarist, Tony MacAlpine, who first drew me in, although Brett Garsed, who was the guitarist on their last album, *Quantum*, is a player that I've loved as well. From about the age of 15 and into my early 20s, I had this thing where I got heavily into guitar players. I grew up listening to the standard classic rock, bluesy stuff like Deep Purple, Gary Moore and that kind of thing because that's what was brought down to me from my dad and that's what I started off playing. Once I got into my teens, I started to discover my own stuff like Steve Vai and Joe Satriani. My introduction to Planet X was through Tony MacAlpine and the *Universe* album, which was the first one he did with them.

For me, because I've always been a rocker, it got me into the fusion aspect of it. The riffs and the grooves got me into it. I love the big solos and the musicianship is absolutely incredible, it's second to none. Virgil Donati's drums are absolute killer and Derek Sherinian is a nutcase on the keyboards as well. I wasn't fully sold on the jazz aspect, but I wanted more technical stuff and for me, Planet X filled that gap. I liked Dream Theater but never really got on with James LaBrie's voice.

I've never touched upon the stuff that Tony MacAlpine can do, really. The thing I've always liked about him was that he could stand up against any of the top shredders in the world. He can play anything that they can play but what he's got, I find, is that sense of melody; that's what I really like. The first tune of his that I heard was *Tears Of Sahara* (from 1987 solo album *Maximum Security*) and his sense of melody and feel, that's something that I've tried to take as a player. I like to be technical, I like to be fast and I like to do more intricate things, but I think it's always important to have the passion and the feel and he's a player that's always done that.

My favourite album of theirs is *Universe,* and *Live From Oz* is just insane. But for newbies, I say fire up *Bitch* from *Universe* go for it!" **JM**

**"I love the big solos and the musicianship is absolutely incredible, it's second to none."**

*Halo Effect by Kris Barras Band is out now on Earache Records. Check out www.krisbarrasband.com for more information and tour dates.*

# PROG IN BRIEF

**Pallas** (right) are set to release the remastered six-CD and Blu-ray box set *Eyes In The Night – The Recordings 1981-1986* via Esoteric on June 28. As well as *The Sentinal, The Wedge* and *Arrive Alive*, extras include BBC sessions, singles and live recordings. See www.pallasofficial.com for more.

*Chapman Whitney Streetwalkers*, the first post-**Family** album by **Roger Chapman** and **Charlie Whitney**, is being re-released as a remastered and expanded 50th anniversary edition via Esoteric on June 28. Extras include a B-side and a BBC John Peel session from 1974. See www.cherryred.co.uk.

Swedish proggers **Beardfish** will release a 15th-anniversary edition of their fifth studio album *Destined Solitaire* via InsideOutMusic on July 19. Available for the first time on vinyl, the double album also includes a six-page booklet with the full cover artwork. See www.facebook.com/beardfish.

# ALBER JUPITER

KRAUTROCK, POST-ROCK, PSYCHEDELIC ROCK

NEW ALBUM

## 'PUIS VIENT LA NUIT'

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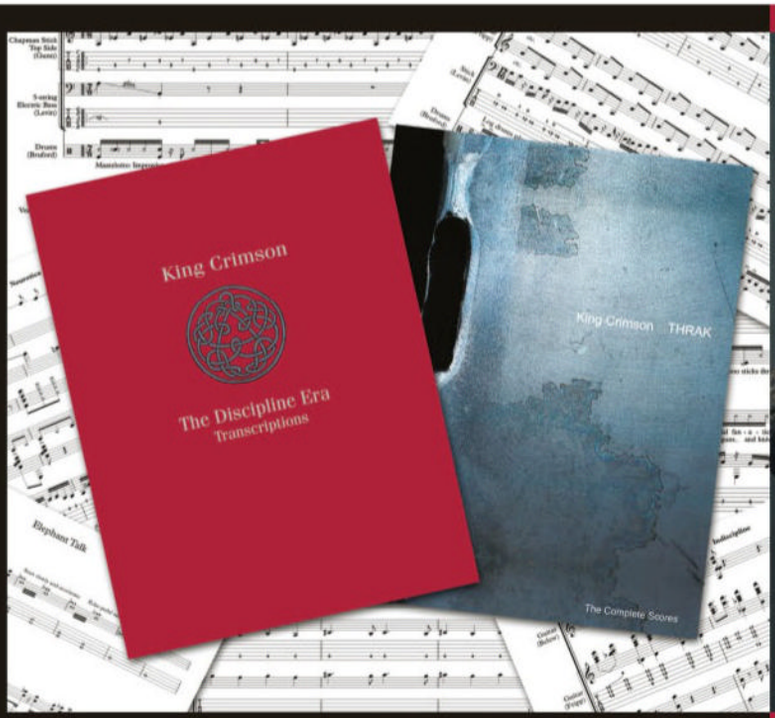
*LP, download and streaming*




## King Crimson Scorebooks

### The Discipline Era & THRAK

Full-band transcriptions for all instruments for the Discipline, Beat, Three of a Perfect Pair and THRAK albums . Meticulously transcribed by **Gabriel Riccio**. Editing and tabs by **Trey Gunn**. Available now through **7dMedia.com**.

## Tu-Ner

### Contact Information & Tu-Ner for Lovers

Two albums from **Tu-Ner**, a mesmerizing musical collaboration featuring touch guitarist **Markus Reuter**, alongside the power-house rhythm section from the renowned 2000's lineup of King Crimson: **Pat Mastelotto** on drums and **Trey Gunn** on Warr guitar.

7DMEDIA
7dmedia.com

# LAURI PORRA

Finnish composer enlists Stephen Fry for a symphonic love letter to the universe.

**THE TAPESTRY OF** Lauri Porra's musical identity has been sewn together by myriad threads. A fourth-generation musician raised in a classical household in Helsinki (he's a direct descendant of composer Sibelius), he went in search of new musical horizons in his teens. Since then, he's spent over two decades immersed in a dizzying variety of projects.

"I stopped going to my cello lessons and bought an electric bass, more out of curiosity than rebellion," he says. "At one point, I was playing in 25 bands, playing bluegrass, Argentinean tango, hip hop, electronic, metal. I just wanted to play and discover how these different styles worked."

Alongside playing bass in power metal band Stratovarius, Porra composes for orchestras and has scored for Finnish films and TV shows. His latest album, *Matter And Time*, meanwhile, is his love letter to the universe; a scientific symphony that tips its hat to jazz and the avant-garde.

"I've always been fascinated by Bach's compositions for masses, where you can feel a real gratitude for God in the music. However, I wanted to write something from a secular point of view," Porra says of the record's driver.

Spinning a tale that arcs through billions of years, from the birth of the universe to the aftermath of humanity's end, in just 50 minutes is no mean feat. Consequently, he tapped up a fellow Finn, astronomer Esko Valtaoja, to craft its script. From there, he let his imagination run wild, putting all his experiences into one great melting pot.

"The message of the album is of love and gratitude," says Porra. "There are a lot of horrible things in the world that need our attention, but I wanted to express gratitude towards the beautiful things. There are dark moments and it goes deep; that's why the end of the album — the end of humanity — is in the middle of the album, so that it still ends on a high note."

The all-important finishing touch comes from its narration, which is delivered by the inimitable vocal chords of English actor Stephen Fry.

"Having Stephen on the album is magical," he relays. "Hearing *that* voice in the context of the album was quite a moment."

Whether scoring films or penning highbrow prog concept albums, Porra believes that "writing music is always the same: You have an intention, and then you try to put it in the music.

"I'm interested in the emotion of music," the Finn explains. "Prog to me is about ambience and the mood. Pink Floyd and Brian Eno were always great at that; they're progressive and minimalist at the same time."

The record has already been performed in Finnish concert halls and received resounding applause. Now he hopes the universal story of *Matter And Time* can reach audiences far beyond his homeland, with hopes to bring it to the UK and Europe.

"The album is about beginnings and endings and that nothing is ever really the end. That can translate into any language," he says. "I hope to do concerts all over the world." **POW**

### PROG FILE

**LINE-UP**

**Lauri Porra** *(bass, synths)*

**SOUNDS LIKE**

A cosmic edition of *Blue Planet*, where twisted jazz rock melds with silver-screen orchestration and a stirring narrative

**CURRENT RELEASE**

*Matter And Time* is out now via Platoon

**WEBSITE**

platoon.lnk.to/matterandtime

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to LAURI PORRA all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

**"There are a lot of horrible things in the world, but I wanted to express gratitude towards the beautiful things."**

**No end in sight: Lauri Porra.**

PRESS/JARMO KATILA

## THE LAST DINNER PARTY

PRELUDE TO ECSTASY

(Island/Universal, 2024)

In 2022, a five-piece group called The Dinner Party were lauded by mainstream media as the new saviours of pop, a theatrical Queen-Kate Bush hybrid for Gens Z and Alpha. Signed to a major label, they'd supported The Rolling Stones but seemed to come from nowhere. In truth, they'd met as students in Brixton in 2019 and bonded at post-punk venue The Windmill, turning up in ballgowns as audience members before realising the stage should be their home. The pandemic halted social activities, but the band woodshedded for months on guitars, keyboards, flute and vocals – both lead and multipart harmonies – and invested in more outfits and bling. Later, their gigs would have suggested dress codes such as *A Night At The Opera* or *Velvet Goldmine*.

By mid-2023 – 'Last' now added to the name – Facebook groups such as Prog Readers and Prog London Gigs were twitching with interest over TLDP's ambitious musical leanings, comments being positive, expectant of good things to come.

And a good thing did come: the debut album *Prelude To Ecstasy*, the title alone saying: ostentatious, indulgent, decadent. These descriptors were on a list made by frontwoman Abigail Morris and bassist Georgia Davis the night they conceived the band and ran around Brixton getting drunk, and adding a colour palette ("red, burgundy, emerald, white, cream"), visuals ("velvet, silk, lace"), and attributes ("gothic, seductive, deviant"). At a recent gig *The Guardian* called them "a costume department's laundry basket upended on a 10-legged prog-pop band."

Starting with an orchestral overture that takes from The Moody Blues' *Days Of Future Passed* as much as George Gershwin, the album is informed by modern influences such as the quasi-operatic pop of Florence + The Machine, as well Bat For Lashes and Siouxsie And The Banshees in respect of Morris' dramatic, enunciated delivery and range of voice-characters. Fans of Rosalie Cunningham should tune in, too, for TLDP's Kurt Weill cabaret bravado and for *Beautiful Boy*'s sparse hymnal psych.

While songs such as *Caesar On A TV Screen* and *Sinner* have DNA in the theatrics of Ziggy Stardust and Roxy Music (check the Manzanera-like guitar of Emily Roberts, a Guildhall graduate with time spent in Brian May mode in Queen tribute, Fat Bottomed Girls) there's also the best of Britpop – Suede, Blur and Pulp – lurking in the song construction and narratives around death, sex and sexuality. Elsewhere, A Flock Of Seagulls meets *Hounds Of Love* for the bruised *Burn Alive*.

Another comparison that looms large is Sparks; trilling baroque pomp with lyrics nicked from classic literature and poetry. "We're pretentious nerds writing for other scholars," Davis told *Rolling Stone*. It turns out they were also writing for prog fans.

**JO KENDALL**

# ALL AROUND THE WORLD

## Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

PRESS

Refusing to endure the silence: Myrath are keen to get the conversation going with fans through their music.

## MYRATH

Live performances by the Tunisian prog-metallers ensure an ongoing dialogue with fans and a message of hope.

**Zaher Zorgati and** Kevin Codfert – the singer and the keyboardist-producer respectively of Tunisian prog metallers Myrath – are laughing loud and long, incredulous at the cliché that bands make music for themselves and if anyone else likes it then "it's a bonus." Myrath, they stress, "compose for the people."

"It's greedy of bands to say the opposite," says Zorgati as he regains his composure. "Music always comes from the musician, it's obvious for them to say, 'Yes, I play music for myself', but for us, the music comes from the bottom of our hearts, our sensations, our experiences, and our souls to the people directly. I don't do this for myself. It's about creating a sense of community and communication. It's very important because when I sing a song and write a lyric, we think about the fans. It's a communication between the fans and us. It's not just a product."

Formed in 2001 under the name X-Tasy, Myrath took shape in 2003 when the band got together with Kevin Codfert of French prog band Adagio when both bands opened for Robert Plant And The Sensational Space Shifters at the Roman Amphitheatre in Carthage.

"When we met with Kevin, he suggested that we could be more mature and more sophisticated musically and that he could bring his knowledge and expertise to the band and making something better than we were back then," says Zorgati as he recalls the band's shift to prog metal via a number of influences closer to home. "We put more of our Tunisian identity into the music."

Extensive touring has also given the band an insight into what their fans positively react to. Says Codfert, "I think the more you play live, the more you can add direct feedback from the fans. You have a better knowledge of what works and what doesn't."

New album *Karma* is, says Zorgati, their "most versatile yet" and one that offers positivity.

"We've always delivered a message of hope," says Zorgati. "But it's not telling stories; this is about a conversation." **JM**

**"It's not about telling stories; this is a conversation with our fans."**

*Karma is out now on earMUSIC. For more info, see www.myrath.com*

## PROG IN BRIEF

PRESS/FRED GERVAIS

**Julie Christmas** (right) has announced her first album in 14 years. *Ridiculous And Full Of Blood* will be released on June 14 via Red CRK. She plays Leeds Brudenell (June 26), London The Garage (27) and ArcTanGent Festival (August 15). For more information see juliechristmas.bandcamp.com.

**Jade Warrior**'s three Vertigo albums – *Jade Warrior*, *Released* and *Last Autumn's Dream* – are to be packaged in a clamshell box set entitled *Borne On The Solar Wind – The Vertigo Albums* via Esoteric Recordings on June 28. The box includes an illustrated booklet. See www.jadewarrior.com for more.

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
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PRESS/DAN ALMASY/PALLBEARER

Pallbearer: enjoying stripping things back.

# PALLBEARER

Arkansas doom-mongerers embrace post-rock elegance on intimate fifth album.

**CELEBRATED DOYENS OF** progressive doom metal, Pallbearer became legendary almost immediately. Debut album *Sorrow And Extinction* emerged in 2012 to widespread acclaim, as this mysterious band from Little Rock, Arkansas, skilfully blended enormous, post-Sabbath riffing with strange, crestfallen melodies and tons of haunting atmosphere. Twelve years on, Pallbearer are certified legends in the cerebral metal underground, but their new album promises to draw in curious prog fans like never before.

Despite many heavy moments, new release *Mind Burns Alive* is a fragile and minimalist affair, and by far the most adventurous thing they've ever created. The elegant flipside to 2020's strident and riff-driven *Forgotten Days*, it perfectly encapsulates Pallbearer's restless creative ambitions.

"This band are still 100 per cent about what we're interested in making," says singer/guitarist Brett Campbell. "That's why the records are all so different from each other. We do something and say, 'OK, it would be boring to do that again, so let's do something else next time.' It's whatever tickles our fancy at the time, or wherever our heads are at as writers."

As Campbell explains, the songs on *Mind Burns Alive* were written alongside those on *Forgotten Days*, some as far back as late 2018. As he and bassist Joseph D Rowland assembled their respective demos, it became apparent that Pallbearer had two distinct new records to play with: one that fulfilled the band's accepted remit of artful but crushing doom metal, and another that took their music further out into the prog realm. From the mellifluous restraint of recent single *When The Light Fades*, to the ornate muscularity of closing epic *With Disease*, *Mind Burns Alive* is a beautiful and endlessly dynamic piece of work.

"*Forgotten Days* was a very stripped-down record for Pallbearer," Campbell notes. "We wanted to do something that would kick you in the teeth. Then we took the other songs, which are more delicate and nuanced, and that sounded like another record, so we ended up with two albums. We originally planned to record *Mind Burns Alive* in March 2020, but for obvious reasons that didn't work out! We tried again in 2021, but we all got Covid! [Laughs] So what you hear on the album is the third version, and I'm glad it turned out that way, because we spent a lot more time refining the songs."

While Pallbearer's early albums were defined by meandering 10-minute epics, *Mind Burns Alive* strips their songwriting down to its bare essence. The result is a gorgeous but reassuringly morose record that seems destined to ruffle a few feathers among the band's die-hard fan contingent. Brett Campbell acknowledges that his band are throwing out a curveball, but also notes that Pallbearer fans should continue to always expect the unexpected.

"We've been around for a while," he grins. "We can still have the same identity, but we can say more with less. People who have been with us over the years, they'll accept that we do different stuff from time to time. I know some people won't like it, but that's like when *When The Light Fades* came out – people were saying, 'What the fuck? Where are the heavy riffs?' There *are* heavy riffs, just not in that song! [Laughs] Next time, we're going to make a polka record. Give the people what they want!" **DL**

**"Next time, we're going to make a polka record. Give the people what they want!"**

## PROG FILE

**LINE-UP**

**Brett Campbell** *(vocals, guitar)*, **Joseph D Rowland** *(bass, vocals)*, **Devin Holt** *(guitar, vocals)*, **Mark Lierly** *(drums)*

**SOUNDS LIKE**

Earthy, post-rock songcraft colliding with esoteric doom (in slow motion)

**CURRENT RELEASE**

*Mind Burns Alive* is out now via Nuclear Blast

**WEBSITE**

www.facebook.com/pallbearerdoom

# Official Progressive Albums Chart

## The prog top 30 albums

April 2024

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1 **HAWKWIND** Stories From Time And Space *(CHERRY RED)*
2 **JANE WEAVER** Love In Constant Spectacle *(FIRE)*
3 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD RECORDS)*
4 **MIKE OLDFIELD** Tubular Bells – 50th Anniversary Edition *(UMC)*
5 **TAME IMPALA** Lonerism *(FICTION)*
6 **GENTLE GIANT** The Missing Piece *(CHRYSALIS)*
7 **STEVE HACKETT** The Circus And The Nightwhale *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
8 **BIG BIG TRAIN** The Likes Of Us *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
9 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
10 **WITHIN TEMPTATION** Bleed Out *(FORCE MUSIC)*
11 **CAMEL** Mirage *(UMC)*
12 **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
13 **THE PINEAPPLE THIEF** It Leads To This *(KSCOPE)*
14 **EMERSON LAKE & POWELL** The Complete Collection *(SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC)*
15 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** This New Noise *(TEST CARD)*
16 **NEKTAR** Recycled *(ESOTERIC)*
17 **THE FLAMING LIPS** Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots *(WARNER MUSIC)*
18 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
19 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** Inform Educate Entertain *(TEST CARD)*
20 **KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
21 **VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR** Still Life *(ESOTERIC)*
22 **JETHRO TULL** The Broadsword And The Beast *(WARNER MUSIC)*
23 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
24 **TARJA** What Lies Beneath *(EARMUSIC)*
25 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
26 **RUSH** Signals *(WARNER MUSIC)*
27 **HAWKWIND** The Future Never Waits *(CHERRY RED)*
28 **PORCUPINE TREE** Deadwing *(TRANSMISSION)*
29 **POLYPHIA** Live At The Factory In Deep Ellum *(RISE)*
30 **RICK WAKEMAN** Live At The London Palladium 2023 *(ESOTERIC)*

FIND OUT MORE AT **WWW.OFFICIALCHARTS.COM**

# WIN! CARL PALMER BOX SET

He's best known for his role in Emerson, Lake & Palmer's iconic sound. Now drummer Carl Palmer's work is celebrated with his own career-defining box set, *Fanfare For The Common Man*. We have a copy to give away to a lucky reader this month.

The three-CD/Blu-ray collection includes music and visuals from ELP as well as Carl Palmer Band, Asia, Atomic Rooster, 3, Mike Oldfield and more. The Blu-ray disc includes the Palmer-narrated documentary *The Rhythm Of Life*, which also includes exclusive behind-the-scenes footage with ELP, Asia, Crazy World Of Arthur Brown and ELP Legacy, among others. There's also a 200-page autobiography illustrated with rare photos from the drummer's personal archive.

To be in with a chance of winning this special prize, visit www.bit.ly/PROG_150 and answer the following question:

**From which band did Carl Palmer join Emerson, Lake & Palmer?**

**a) The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown**

**b) Chris Farlowe & The Thunderbirds**

**c) Atomic Rooster**

For more information see www.carlpalmer.com

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS:** This competition will be open from May 17-June 21, 2024. By entering you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). Entries limited to one per household regardless of the form of entry. Use of automated devices as methods of submission are not valid forms of entry. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition. All prize details are correct at time of press; *Prog* magazine reserves the right to offer an alternative, if necessary. The winner will be notified by Future by email after the closing date. If a winner has not responded after 28 days, an alternative winner will be drawn.

## Now our turn...

**The Editor**
Jerry Ewing

**BILL FISHER**
**How To Think Like A Billionaire**
SEPTAPHONIC RECORDS

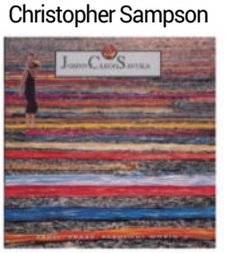
**The Art Guy**
Russell Fairbrother

**KEVIN KASTNING & MARK WINGFIELD**
**Rubicon II**
GREYDISC RECORDS

**The Deputy Ed**
Natasha Scharf

**CALEB LANDRY JONES**
**Hey Gary, Hey Dawn**
SACRED BONES

**The Musician**
Christopher Sampson



**JOHNNY CLEGG & SAVUKA**
**Cruel, Crazy, Beautiful World**
CAPITOL

**The Writer**
Jordan Blum

**OU**
**II: Frailty**
INSIDEOUTMUSIC

**The Reader**
Janne Yliruusi

**SLEEPYTIME GORILLA MUSEUM**
**Of The Last Human Being**
AVANT NIGHT

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to FINAL COIL all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
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PRESS/ESTER SEGARRA

Final Coil: not fake news.

# FINAL COIL

UK prog metal trio tackle polarising mindsets on their far-reaching conceptual trilogy.

**FINAL COIL WAS** originally a solo project born from the mind of multi-instrumentalist Phil Stiles back in 2002, but it didn't remain a one-man band for long. After meeting guitarist Richard Awdry through a mutual friend, the duo wrote and recorded some demos before Stiles headed off to Poland for four years to teach English. The pair remained in touch however, so upon Stiles's return to Leicester in 2008 they decided to get together to see whether they could scratch a collective musical itch together again. Stiles's wife, Jola, whom he fondly describes as a "very, very talented musician", completed the trio on bass duties.

Working on songs in 2008 that had existed since 2003 confirmed that the material the band had slowly written and even recorded during some of Awdry's visits to Poland over the years was worth pouring more time, money and love into. But they never had "any vision" of it going further than "just playing music together".

Despite doing a few recordings that they "don't really talk about", it wasn't until the release of 2015's *Closed To The Light* EP that Final Coil began to garner attention. With the EP eventually attracting the attention of a small recording studio in Italy, the band were propositioned.

"They wrote to us and said, 'Look, if you come to Italy and record with us, we will pitch you to a label,'" Stiles tells *Prog*. "We live in an era of internet scams, so we looked at it a little aghast at first. But we thought, 'To hell with it — the worst case scenario is we get a month in Italy as a holiday and we get to play music,'" he recalls.

True to their word, the studio recommended Final Coil to Wormhole Death records, and their debut, *Persistence Of Memory*, was released via them in 2017. By the time the album was recorded and mixed, Stiles had already finished writing its successor, *The World We Left Behind For Others*, which was released in 2019.

Despite never setting out with the intention of writing a trilogy, that's exactly what Stiles would go on to do, concluding with *The World We Inherited*, which came out earlier this year via Sliptrick. The trio tell a story of Stiles's grandparents, and how their experiences pushed them "to have very different mindsets" about the world we live in. The albums narrate polarising opinions and experiences, including the EU referendum vote and the election of Trump, and goes on to discuss how people get churned up with conspiracy theories, leading them to lose themselves to their families and friends, having been "dominated by hatred".

It's a deeply personal narrative, presented in a way that many can relate to. It's in this way that Stiles believes Final Coil are progressive.

"I like the idea of prog being a very open-ended thing in terms of music, but if you're going to stick the label on it, it comes through the conceptual approach that we've taken with our records," he explains. "And what I wrote was a kind of dystopian fantasy that seems to have become the reality." **CF**

**"What I wrote was a kind of dystopian fantasy that seems to have become the reality."**

## PROG FILE

**LINE-UP**

**Phil Stiles** *(vocals, guitars, synths, programming),* **Richard Awdry** *(guitars, vocals, programming),* **Jola Stiles** *(bass)*

**SOUNDS LIKE**

If Tool and Katatonia had a baby that was immediately subjected to a post-pandemic world

**CURRENT RELEASE**

*The World We Inherited* is out now on Sliptrick

**WEBSITE**

www.facebook.com/finalcoil

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The Beggs Sisters

After a busy year of live shows, The Beggs Sisters are happy to release their debut EP 'Sleep with the Ghost' - available to stream now on Apple Music, Deezer and Spotify. The trio have been performing around the country gathering new fans for their unique style of melodic folk and will start performing live shows in the summer of 2024.

After releasing three singles, the seven track EP concludes their desire to speak openly about mental health, heartbreak, and existentialism, providing the listener with an insight into their experiences.

thebeggssisters_
thebeggssisters



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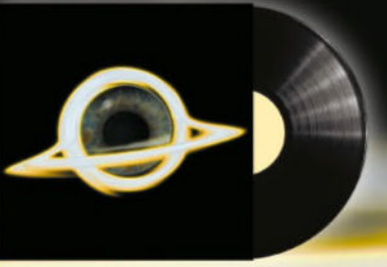

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BOUDICCA RECORDS

# PLANTOID

Bold jazz fusion-inspired shapes from ambitious young Brits.

**IT TOOK PLANTOID** three moves around the UK — from Lincoln to London to Brighton — for roots to form, to find a supportive record label, and for their career to blossom further. Although the bandmembers are still young in age, theirs is certainly not an overnight success.

"We've probably been going for about eight or nine years," fresh-faced co-founder and guitarist Tom Coyne tells us, recalling the time when the band were called Mangö. "We'd been doing all the same London pub gigs, and then Covid happened… we were on the verge of splitting up."

A new city and a new name brought opportunities. They played a New Year's Eve show in Brighton in 2022, when a rep from Bella Union happened to be in the audience. Label founder Simon Raymonde then went to the next show, contacting them shortly after.

"We get this message from Simon Raymonde, from the Cocteau Twins!" Coyne laughs, "and we didn't open it for a week, we thought it was spam. We did a bit of research, found out that it *was* him. We then went to meet him for a coffee and he was a lovely guy who, unbelievably, wanted to work with us."

Raymonde has good taste — just look at the Bella Union catalogue — but Plantoid were also gaining a reputation as "the best live band in Brighton", their style an exciting, often noisy mix of jazz, indie and post-rock with a mighty measure of jazz fusion included. Their influences go back to the nucleus of Coyne and vocalist-guitarist Chloe Spence, who met at Lincoln College.

Grimsby-born Coyne would spend time at Spence's home in the tiny village of Cadney where they'd write together, greatly encouraged by their mentor Dave Mallett, the Head Of Music at the college and a local legend playing many nights around piano bars, getting students to perform alongside him. But where did the progressive influence come from?

"I'm a guitarist and I've always been a fan of guitar music," Coyne says, "so first it was Guns N'Roses and AC/DC. Chloe had a record player in her back room and we'd play her mum and dad's collection all the time. That's when we got interested in Pink Floyd and *Tubular Bells*. Some of the music was wild, and that was pretty inspiring."

As time went on, the pair would find further inspirations: Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Stanley Turrentine and Mahavishnu Orchestra for Coyne; Jeff Buckley, Sarah Vaughn, Robert Plant and Nai Palm from Aussie funkateers Hiatus Kaiyote for Spence. Eventually they'd find bassist Bernardo Larisch ("He's the Portuguese Jaco Pastorius") and talented drummer Louis Bradshaw.

No Plantoid song ends as it started; the listener just has to strap themselves in for the ride, which could end up anywhere. This is evident in the recently released debut album *Terrapath*. It features songs from across the band's lifespan with the funky prog of *Modulator* the most recent and epic, and cinematic album opener *Is That You?* "One of the first things we ever wrote," Coyne says. "That had to be our intro — it's a nice homage to our roots." **JK**

**PROG FILE**

**LINE-UP**

**Chloe Spence** *(vocals, rhythm guitar)*, **Tom Coyne** *(lead guitar)*, **Bernardo Larisch** *(bass)*, **Louis Bradshaw** *(drums, percussion)*

**SOUNDS LIKE**

Ambitious post-rocky jazz-prog with some gnarly fusion guitar on the side

**CURRENT RELEASE**

*Terrapath* is out now via Bella Union

**WEBSITE**

www.plantoid.co.uk

**"We got this message from Simon Raymonde, from the Cocteau Twins, and thought it was spam."**

Plantoid want you to strap in for the ride.

PRESS/CALI TITMAS

Q&A

# CHARLIE BRAMALD

Ghost Of The Machine's vocalist discusses his latest project, Age Of Distraction, and plans for some pulse-racing gigs.

**Words:** Phil Weller **Portrait:** Dom Bennison

Since joining Ghost Of The Machine in 2022, Yorkshire-based vocalist Charlie Bramald has kept himself busy. He's also released music with ambient proggers Nova Cascade, alt rock/prog hybrid Shadows On Mercury and Nine Skies, which has helped him leave an indelible imprint on the scene.

Now he's joined forces with former ex-This Winter Machine guitarist John Cook for Age Of Distraction, although he explains this was "in spite of myself, because I was already quite busy". Originally intended to be a Cook solo project exploring the guitarist's heavier side, it quickly evolved into an exciting new band that melds together melodic and progressive metal. He gives us the lowdown.

**How did the Age Of Distraction come to fruition and who's in the band?**
John [Cook] founded it as an outlet for material that didn't fit into This Winter Machine's canon and it's ended up as a full band project, with myself on vocals. You've got Mark Gatland [Hats Off Gentlemen It's Adequate] on bass and keyboards, and Dom Bennison [ex-This Winter Machine] on drums, keyboards and production. We figured it would be a band when we went into the studio last year to record the first single, *Compromised*. It'd been really collaborative, writing had been really easy, and when you're all on the same page you just want to go with it.

**When did you and John connect?**
We started talking a little over a year ago on social media and we really hit it off. We're both big Pain Of Salvation and Devin Townsend fans, and appreciate the heavier end of the progressive spectrum. He sent me some tracks and I ended up penning vocals for what became *Compromised*. I didn't think I would have time for another collaboration, but I enjoyed the music so much that I couldn't refuse it.

**"I didn't think I would have time for another collaboration, but I enjoyed the music so much that I couldn't refuse it."**

**They're two heavy bands, but they're theatrical too...**
I think that's where we approached it from: Dom wanted to sprinkle in these Devin choirs to give some of the tracks a big, beefy sound. Peter Gabriel is my all-time favourite rock singer, I've always been inspired by his theatrical approach and how he gets his stories across with more than words. But there are a lot of dynamics, we all come from melodic prog backgrounds, so we bring that to the project as well.

**How collaborative was the writing process?**
We've all been able to put our own individual stamp on our part of the process. That's in no way to diminish John's massive influence, because the vast majority of the music comes from him, but we've all come in on top of that. Mark's added really tasteful bass parts that chimed with what John was going for. It's quite remarkable how much we've been able to transform those first ideas together.

**What of the album's two guests, Phil Stuckey (vocals) and Ruby Jones (piano and keys)?**
Phil got involved before we became a band, but his contribution was so good that it had to be presented as is. He's an extraordinary vocalist with a marvellous mind. He's absolutely incredible with Stuckfish and there's something so wonderful about his lyricism and phrasing. With *Take Me Down*, I think he lends a different flavour at the right point in the album.

Ruby is a good friend of mine. We've played in cover bands before I got involved in original music and she's one of the most versatile and talented people I know. I knew she'd be able to provide a touch more on the keys and piano parts of *The Uninvited* and *Take Me Down* and she did exactly that.

**Tell us about the album's lyrical theme...**
It was heavily influenced by toxic relationships and that threads itself through the whole album. *A Game Of Whispers* is about two people who are saying things about each other, but not talking to each other and creating these distorted shadows of their opposite number. I think we see an awful lot of that in contemporary society.

The fascinating thing here is that Phil Stuckey produced some very similar themes with his lyrics without us comparing notes. John Cook wrote the lyrics for *Oceans* and that had the similar imagery, too. It probably comes from how the music felt and grew from there.

**What are your personal standout moments on the album?**
We wrote and recorded *Oceans* at the end of a vocal tracking day. John picked up an acoustic and played these chords and I started processing a melody to go with the lyrics he'd already written. In an hour and a half, we had a complete song, including some of the orchestral arrangements, which really blew me away. I'm not one of the most spontaneous people. I like to come in rehearsed and refined, so to do something on the spur of the moment really pushed me out of my comfort zone, and I think it was deliberate on John's part.

**What does the future hold for the band?**
John never stops. He's a creative force full of ideas and full of enthusiasm, so it would astonish me if he's not already written half of the next album. The live question has been asked and there is a will within the band to make it happen if we can, but there are a lot of logistical aspects. It's challenging, but it's not impossible.

**What other projects are keeping you busy?**
I've probably had my busy period of appearing on other projects. For the moment, I will be focusing on Ghost Of The Machine's second album after telling people to buy Age Of Distraction's album! We're in the process of beating the songs to death so that we're ready to go into the studio and make the record we want to make, so that's my focus for the second half of this year. We're also exploring avenues to get more gigs in the calendar that might set pulses racing.

*Age Of Distraction's A Game Of Whispers is out on May 31 via Gravity Dream Music. See www.ageofdistraction.co.uk for more information.*

# "Like having a brick wall coming at you!"

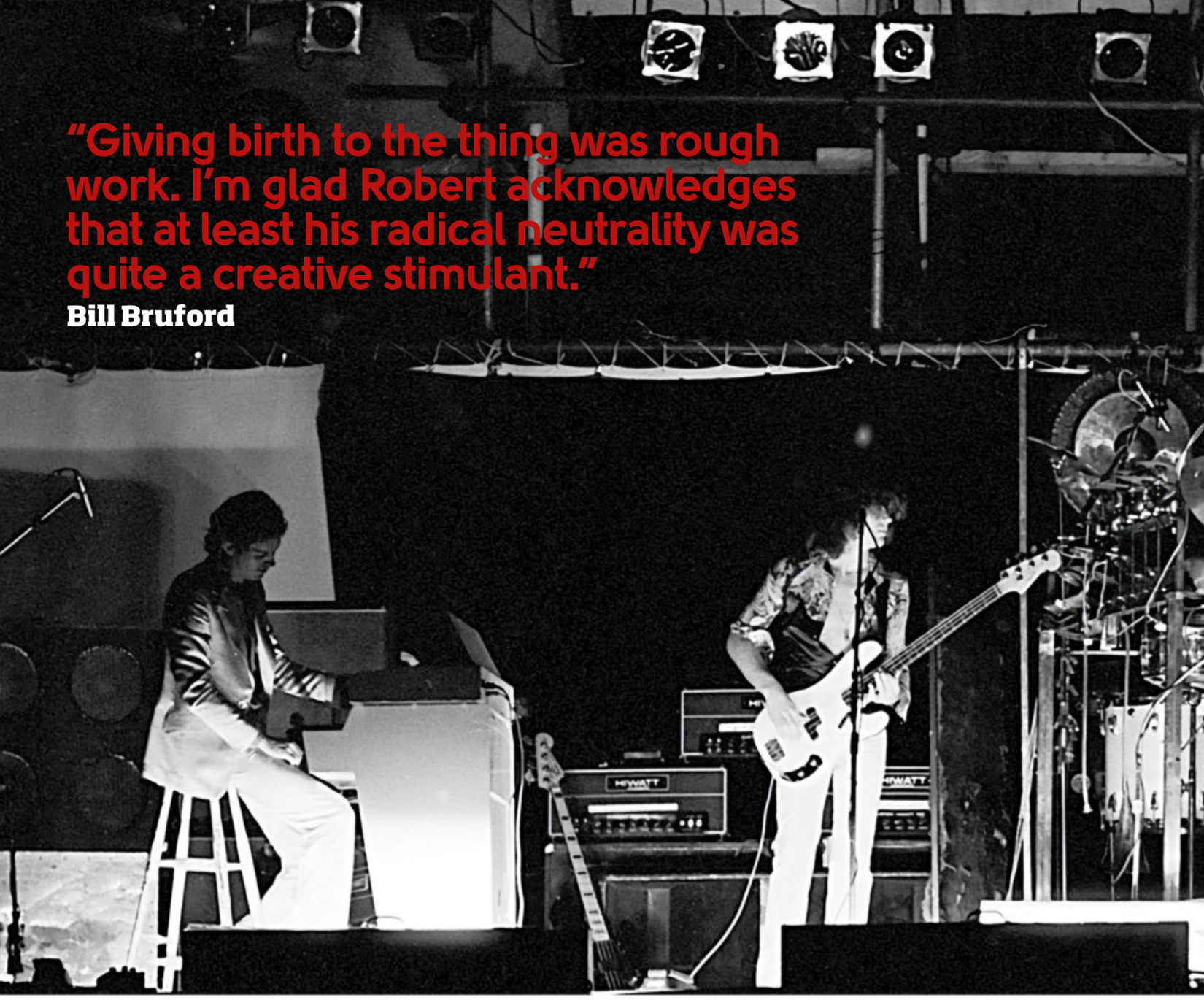
In 1974, **King Crimson** released one of their most underrated, at the time, albums. *Red*, created by the powerhouse trio Robert Fripp, John Wetton and Bill Bruford, didn't even reach the UK Top 40 and yet it's now regarded by many as a key work – not only in Crimson's back catalogue but also as a foundation stone in what would later become known as progressive metal. On its 50th anniversary, Crimson's alumni discuss the allure of an album that's reduced some adults to tears.

**Words:** Sid Smith
**Portraits:** Gered Mankowitz courtesy of DGM Ltd.

**"I was simply going with whatever was coming my way. And what was coming my way from John and Bill was startlingly impressive."**

**Robert Fripp**

Out of the shadows: the men who saw *Red*.



**"Giving birth to the thing was rough work. I'm glad Robert acknowledges that at least his radical neutrality was quite a creative stimulant."**
**Bill Bruford**

At the completion of a take on the new instrumental track, Robert Fripp, Bill Bruford and John Wetton down tools and file out of the heavily padded door in Olympic's Studio Two and into the adjacent control room, where engineer George Chkiantz sits at the 16-track desk. The trio are keen to listen back to their work. George asks his assistant to cue the tape and press play. The chain-mounted Tannoy speakers dangling from the ceiling deliver the music in the confines of the relatively small space with such a punch it feels like being hit by a 10-ton truck. As the two-inch tape spools through the machine, each player's attention zeroes in on the tiniest inflection within their respective performances, quality checking at a micro-level for any faults that might have gone unnoticed in the heat of the take. At the same time, they are also considering the macro level, pulling their respective viewpoints to also be able to take in the totality of the bigger picture, assessing the feel and weight of this new composition.

After the final note has died away Fripp asks, "Well, what do you think?"

"I'm not sure. The tune reminds me of *Tea For Two*, you know? I don't really get it," replies Bruford.

"Well, we don't have to use it," offers Fripp.

"No," says Wetton. "We use it!"

It's interesting to think that had the conversation back in early July 1974 gone in a different direction, the track *Red* might not have made it to the record, instead consigned to the vaults or perhaps appearing on a future Robert Fripp solo record. Speaking to *Prog* from his home via Zoom just ahead of a speaking tour in North America with his business partner and producer, David Singleton, Fripp recalls the day in question.

"Bill did not get the piece *Red*, where he had just played the defining drum part, one of the highlights of my time working with Bill; he just didn't get what had happened," he says with a note of incredulity in his voice. "My response to that, whether at that particular moment or shortly afterward was, 'Well, look, if you want to use it and yet you don't know what you're dealing with, instead of sharing the publishing for writing it on this song, I will claim 100 per cent of the publishing.' Which was agreed, but never happened. Eventually, sometime in 2007/8, I was in touch with Bill and with John, and we had that finally, as agreed, put in place some 40 years after recording *Red*."

Nothing in King Crimson is ever quite as straightforward as it might be, especially when it comes to charting the road to *Red*. Along the way, the gnawing combination of bone-deep exhaustion, individuals variously in the thrall of a crisis of confidence, spiritual epiphany, substance abuse, and competing aims would snag and eventually unravel the fabric of the

COURTESY OF DGM LTD

band to the point where it all came apart. By its release in October 1974, King Crimson had, in Fripp's words at the time, "ceased to exist" and despite positive reviews it failed to make it into the Top 30 album charts, peaking at No.45 for just one week, making it Crimson's poorest-performing album of the 70s. Yet in the face of adversity and commercial indifference, *Red*'s reputation and influence has steadily grown in stature over the 50 years since its recording and it's often regarded by many commentators, as well as the band themselves, as King Crimson's most accomplished album since the wildfire success of their 1969 debut.

When the *Islands*-era band of Ian Wallace, Boz Burrell and Mel Collins sheared away from Fripp in April of 1972 following a gruelling two-month North American tour, the guitarist threw himself into producing free-jazz acts and Robert Wyatt's Matching Mole's second album, all while considering his next step. What came next wasn't so much a step as a giant leap with the formation of the *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* quintet.

Recruiting avant-garde game-changing percussionist Jamie Muir; a young unknown violinist, David Cross; Family bassist John Wetton and Yes's firebrand drummer, Bill Bruford, Fripp rebuilt King Crimson from the ground up with a distinctive emphasis on a harder, precision-tooled sound fashioned and informed by ample reserves of musical technique of its eclectic membership. With such an expanded musical vocabulary, Crimson reached comfortably into free-jazz expression as well as the dynamics and asymmetric timbres more akin to contemporary classical music than rock'n'roll. Perhaps more important than any of this, they had at their disposal a unique and magical chemistry that enabled them to pursue collective improvisation on the turn of a dime. It was in the high-stakes environment during this short-lived incarnation's only UK tour, in the winter of 1972, that the seeds of the songs *Fallen Angel* and *One More Red Nightmare* were planted and left to slowly germinate. With Muir abruptly quitting the band in 1973, just before *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*'s release, the remaining quartet doubled down on the amount of improvisation within their live shows, integrating written material and spontaneous compositions to the point where audiences were mostly unable to tell them apart. Examples of this approach can be found on 1974's *Starless And Bible Black*, including the diaphanous title track, the pastoral calm of *Trio*, *We'll Let You Know*'s querulous mutant funk, and later, *Providence* from *Red*, where the mood shifts from gothic ambiguity to confrontational avant-rock. All of these pieces, especially the last track taken from Crimson's final tour of the 1970s, demonstrate how important being on the road was for Crimson's creative process. But it came at a price.

**King Crimson onstage in Central Park, New York, in 1974. This was the final show they played before recording *Red*, and the last one to feature David Cross.**

In considering the way rock bands toured in 1974 compared to 2024,

## RED AND ME: DAVID CROSS

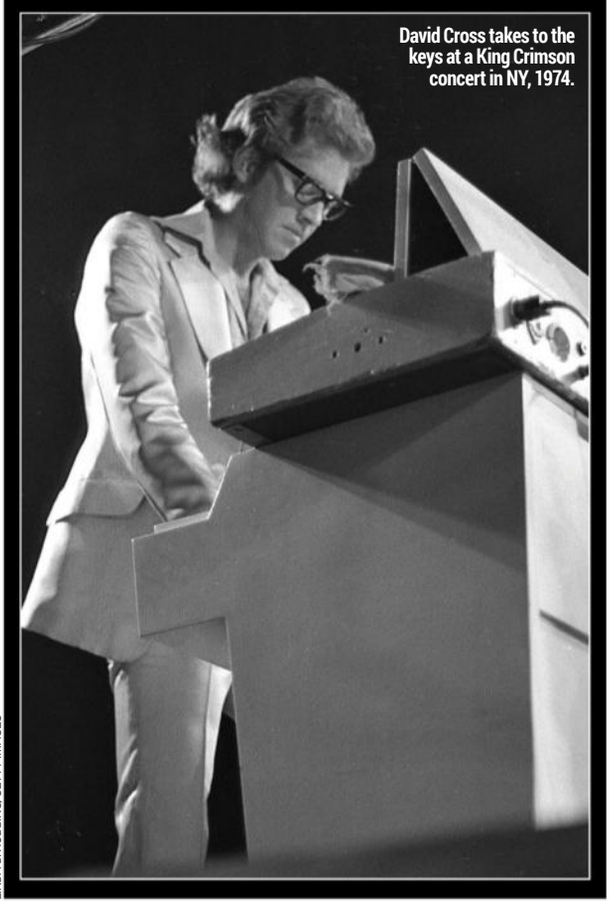
"I have some kind of deep relationship with *Starless*."

In 2023 the David Cross Band released *Ice Blue, Silver Sky*, which aside from a collection of original material also featured two King Crimson numbers the violinist had a hand in writing, *Exiles* from *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* and *Starless*. The latter track is something of an obsession for him, Cross admits, and comes after a 2015 collaboration with Robert Fripp, *Starless Starlight*, which expanded the track's principal melody into a full-length ambient suite featuring Cross's looping violin and Fripp's soundscapes. What were his reasons for returning to the track he last performed with King Crimson in 1974?

"It's odd, isn't it? I really thought I had finished with it when I did the *Starless Starlight* album, that it was well and truly sorted. I suppose there are two reasons: I wanted to record the band version with [David Cross Band] vocalist Jinian Wilde. The other reason I think, and I'm not sure whether it's healthy at all [laughs], but because I have some kind of deep relationship with *Starless*.

"In my teens, there was a really strong identification with Dylan Thomas's poem *Under Milk Wood*, from which the line *'Starless and bible black'* is heard at the beginning. I'd recited this poem in a speaking competition when I was at school. On this album, I suppose I was trying to get back to the whole Dylan Thomas thing. So I went back to his words and plundered the characters from *Under Milk Wood* and brought them into the long breakdown section of our version of *Starless*.

"We've added all these voices calling out from the darkness, all these shipwrecked, murdered and murdering people calling from the sea. And also what's happened is we've added a bit more tension even than was there originally. We've made it a little bit nastier and a little bit edgier than it's ever been before because there is a dark side to it. There's no kind of explanation in the song. The song is there and then all of a sudden, you just turn the different direction and you've got this long, slow build-up and those wonderful repeated notes, so it's got this real darkness to it. I kind of went in search for it, back to the Thomas text, and, for me, that kind of throws a light on it. It made me feel that we can take this further. You know, there's something darker here than we dared to look at before." **SS**



David Cross takes to the keys at a King Crimson concert in NY, 1974.

LINDA D. ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

the past was very much a different country. These days the average UK and European touring itinerary of a moderately successful group might stretch to around seven to 10 consecutive days. Fifty years ago that would easily turn into weeks with only a few days off in between. While Crimson were popular enough in Europe, the feeling was that America was the place to be. Although their album sales figures were never remotely close to that of Pink Floyd, Jethro Tull, ELP or Yes, the feeling in much of the Crimson camp was their future lay not in Europe, but firmly across the Atlantic.

Throughout 1973 and the bulk of 1974 Crimson schlepped between the East and West coasts and many points north and south, toiling away in incongruous support slots, slowly but surely pushing their way up to the top of the bill as they diligently worked the college circuit and the larger theatres of the day. In the popular imagination, being on tour might appear to be a glamorous cavalcade of foreign travel, swanky hotels, sightseeing and the ego-stroking payoff of enthusiastic crowds cheering your work to the rafters. Of course, the truth is somewhat more prosaic. Touring then, as now, inevitably took place within the insular bubble of getting from A to B. Back then, hotels for King Crimson were entry-level. The possibility of appreciating the local sights was limited as a day off would almost always be spent travelling to the next venue, given the distances involved.

**"Robert's phrase about how playing with Bill and John was like having a flying brick wall coming at you really describes how they were."**

**Jakko Jakszyk**

What touring largely consists of is a lot of waiting around in anonymous airport lounges or the back seat of saloon cars down featureless interstates with a couple of local pit stops. Faced with this unwavering diet, even the well-adjusted can be undermined by the cumulative, potentially destabilising ennui and inertia that gets under a person's skin. Some deal with it better than others. Bruford kept busy, reading, attempting yoga, practising saxophone with a sock stuffed down the bell in the privacy of his hotel room. Fripp, who'd also been constantly on the road since 1971, not only systematically practised guitar as much as he could, but also read voraciously and kept a journal. Just as Jamie Muir had quit Crimson in 1973 to pursue a spiritual calling to become a Buddhist monk, during that final American tour Fripp's encounter with the writings of English mystic JG Bennett so deeply and profoundly resonated with him, confirming his sense of needing to alter the course of his life. Like so many of his contemporaries in rock, John Wetton, as a young, single man, eagerly embraced the 'sex, drugs, rock'n'roll' lifestyle. In the short term hedonism was good fun, even though it would sometimes affect his judgement during the recording of *Red* as he experimented with different substances, and in the longer term, became the foundation to John's well-publicised battle with addiction in later life.

For David Cross, life in Crimson was rewarding from a musical viewpoint, although not without its challenges given his proximity to Wetton's increasingly louder-by-the-gig bass cabinet and suboptimal onstage monitoring. He felt he was becoming marginalised by the combined force of Wetton and Bruford's sound, described by Fripp as being akin to a "flying brick wall". Well before the end of the tour, Cross had already decided to quit while being unaware of a decision taken by the band to fire him when the group returned to the UK.

Speaking from his London home in 2024, in between dates performing the *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* album in full with his live band Cross, he candidly admits that his last few weeks were extremely difficult.

"I loved being onstage with that band, especially when we were improvising and when we were in the zone on stuff, able to really push forward. That was lovely. The bits I didn't like were when I let myself down, when I lost heart, when I lost courage; I didn't like that. I suffered from a lot of anxiety, which was probably caused by me drinking a lot. I started developing height phobia and stuff like that by that stage. That happened in a hotel in Texas. It was one of those first hotels that was built with the balconies looking down

Robert Fripp began to explore his mystical side during the *Red* era.

Wetton was sad when his proto-*Starless* was initially rejected.

inside and I was put up on the 30th floor or something. I just suddenly didn't like the drop down there as I tried to get to my room, so I got moved down to about the 11th floor. The whole process of my mental health deteriorating like that was in itself frightening anyway. You do feel it's just happening to you."

With Cross filled with self-doubt and his problems beginning to affect his performances, Wetton in particular argued that what the group needed to boost their chances of really breaking America in 1975 was a stronger instrumentalist. Violinist Wilf Gibson, who had been in the Electric Light Orchestra, was sounded out by EG Management about joining; however Gibson, who had a young family and did not want to tour, rejected the approach. In any event, Wetton's real preference was for Crimson co-founder, sax-player and multi-instrumentalist Ian McDonald to join, leading to McDonald being invited to guest on *One More Red Nightmare* and *Starless*.

opening passage of Dylan Thomas's 1954 radio play *Under Milk Wood*, it connected so strongly with Wetton and the other Crims that it was assigned to an instrumental improvisation and used as the title to *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*'s follow-up album. However, before its release, by the next bout of writing and rehearsing in February 1974, the quartet revisited Wetton's ballad, only this time it would be augmented by several decisive and transformational new elements. The first came in a soundcheck while the band were touring during the tail-end of 1973.

"I can remember standing onstage in a soundcheck messing around with it, and just trying to trying to find some kind of satisfaction with it," remembers violinist David Cross, thinking back to the origins of the mournful, woebegone melody, which opens *Starless*.

"I was experimenting with this kind of leap. I was always trying to find a way to get up and come down again.

## "I hear the opening bars of the Mellotron, and as soon as the melody comes in the tears come down. It's just like a faucet's been turned on."

### Pat Mastelotto

In their soundchecks at the time, Fripp would often throw out a chord or a motif which might or might not get picked up on by the others. One of these had been the see-saw riff of *Red*. Sometimes, however, a more fully fleshed-out idea would be presented in the more formal surroundings of the rehearsal room. Just as the inclusion of the title track had momentarily hung in the balance at Olympic Studios, *Starless*, one of the most well-regarded and most recognised King Crimson tracks was, for a while at least, the song that almost never happened. Wetton and lyricist Richard Palmer-James penned a ballad and presented an early draft of it to a KC rehearsal in late 1973. Wetton has previously recalled being somewhat crestfallen when his sensitive song was met with polite indifference as the band quickly went on to other things.

"Rehearsals were always an icy and rather bleak kind of engagement," comments Bruford today. "There was a lot of floor staring."

However, what Wetton's bandmates *did* like was the line from the song's chorus, '*starless and bible black*'. Co-opted by Palmer-James from the

And I wanted to get up the octave and I wanted to feature the ninth of the scale, which is very powerful. I wanted to do it in a satisfying way. So I was always playing around with it, just wearing everybody down around it until we took some notice of it. Robert probably just got bored with listening to me fluffing around with it, and he picked it up and did some stuff with it and probably turned it into a proper tune or I'd have just kept flapping around with it. He reckoned I started it and he finished it."

Another feature of the new piece came after Bill Bruford was playing piano at home.

"I was interested in music in its whole totality," explains Bruford, six decades after he came up with the glowering bass line melody that underpins the whole central section of the piece.

"A piano is wonderful because you can see the notes and it's highly rhythmic. So for someone like me, who's going to do a rhythmic thing, just bang on a note, and out comes a rhythm on a pitch. If you then change some of those notes you get a rhythm with a bit of melody and then you

## RED AND ME: MEL COLLINS

"I just think it's one of those songs that has a special meaning for Robert and the band that he had at that time with John Wetton, Bill Bruford and David Cross."

Sax player Mel Collins – who had previously appeared on 1970's *In The Wake Of Poseidon*, *Lizard* and 1971's *Islands* – split from King Crimson, alongside bandmates Boz Burrell and Ian Wallace, after a long and often difficult US tour in early 1972. Quickly establishing himself as a go-to session player for numerous groups and artists during the rest of the 1970s and beyond, Collins's skills as a player and arranger were in constant demand.

"In those days I was doing so much work, and I was in the studio with Humble Pie in Olympic working on their album *Thunderbox*, and down the corridor was Crimson doing *Red*," he recalls. "It wasn't a case of bumping into Robert in the canteen or something like that. I think I got a call from EG Management asking me to come in, and so I came straight from the Humble Pie sessions and into King Crimson.

"It was the first time I'd talked to Robert in ages. We hadn't done anything together since we split up after that last American tour and said our goodbyes and that was it."

After all these years, Collins's memory of the session for Crimson is vague. However, his soprano saxophone embellishments at the beginning of *Starless* were crucial in adding to the piece its legendary status. In 2014, Collins was back as a full-time member of King Crimson and playing *Starless* in concert, 40 years after his original appearance on the album.

"I had to listen to the record and write down the music as it played so I could learn it. Then it was a case of figuring out the possible parts I might play on sax or flute for the other numbers from the record such as the title track, *Fallen Angel*, and *One More Red Nightmare*. I'd write down ideas and check in with Robert to see what he thought, to make sure he liked where I was going with them, which he generally did. I remember going to rehearsals for the first time and seeing the three drummers sitting as the front line. I don't think any of us thought it would work, but Robert's pretty astute when it comes to these kinds of things, and it was incredible. Hats off to him for that. We would end with *Starless*, and it's the only time we had any lighting effects onstage and so the lights would slowly turn crimson as we played the song. It was always going to be a showstopper anyway, as people knew that song, and Crimson hadn't played it live for so long. It was great and it featured the whole band in every possible way. And I just think it's one of those songs that has a special meaning for Robert and the band that he had at that time with John Wetton, Bill Bruford and David Cross. It was such a great song." **SS**

Mel Collins and sax in the 70s.

UNIVERSAL ARCHIVE/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

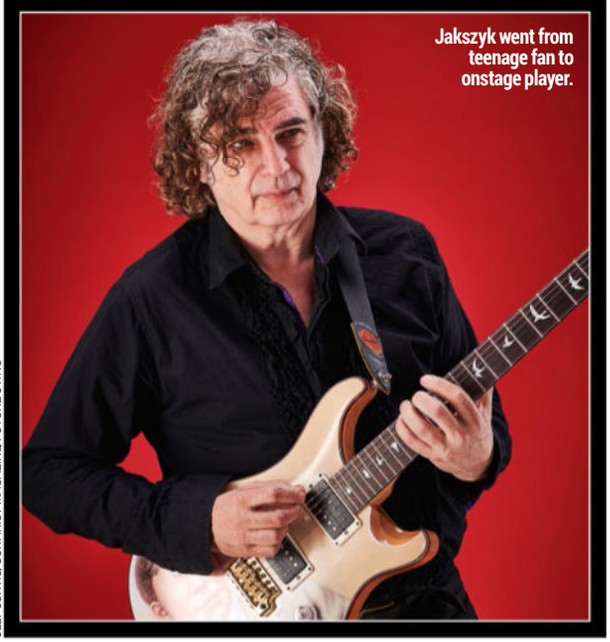
## RED AND ME: JAKKO JAKSZYK

"I love *Red* and playing the material from the album is brilliant."

"In 1974 I was 16 years old and I briefly worked in the record department of WH Smith's on Watford High Street. The albums arrived in large boxes and I used to unpack them. I knew the release dates of various records and so I knew that when those boxes came in that morning, King Crimson would be one of them. And so the first time I ever saw the cover of *Red* was after opening up the new stock that day. I remember being shocked by it because it was the first time there had been an image of the band on the front cover of any of their albums. I was excited when we played it in the shop. My first impression was that there was a more stripped-back kind of sensibility, although I'm not sure that's especially true. Some of the kind of subtler intricacies that were evident certainly in *Lizard* and *Larks' Tongues In Aspic* were replaced by some pretty big riffage. Looking back on it, with Bill Bruford and the Jamie Muir-inspired trash-can cymbal, John Wetton's bass sound and Robert really giving it the full-metal sound, it just feels a precursor to the later more metallic things that they did. Robert's phrase about how playing with Bill and John was like having a flying brick wall coming at you really describes how they were. And also the thing that Robert used to say about David Cross, about how he didn't stand a chance against that situation, I mean it does sound like that, it does sound like, 'Get out of the fucking way.' The more subtler aspects of the violin got lost at that juncture.

"I love *Red* and playing the material from the album is brilliant. Playing the title track was kind of the King Crimson equivalent of *Johnny B Goode* in a way, much simpler than a lot of previous material, so it was one of those tunes you could relax into. I loved playing *Fallen Angel* with that beautiful arpeggiated guitar thing at the end. I remember we were in Canada and I didn't usually play that section as Bill Rieflin played it on keyboards. That particular night his rig suddenly stopped working and because I'm so familiar with it I just jumped in with it so that nobody noticed. With *One More Red Nightmare*, I used to struggle to find a way to make the words fit because the lyrics didn't scan and it's *very* high for me as a vocalist. I remember when Robert was changing the set every night, I always used to ask, 'Is there any chance we can have an instrumental after *One More Red Nightmare*, because I'm really blasting my voice out for that?'

"And Robert would say, 'Yes, of course,' and then two sets later he'd put a fucking ballad after it and I'd be fucked. [Laughs.] *Starless*, I think, encompasses King Crimson's entire career up to that point in the 1970s. It's got this beautiful ballad with all the Mellotron at the beginning, and then it goes into a kind of spiky, broken-down bit leading into the big riffing at the end. It contains almost every aspect of Crimson in one song in a way that none of the other tunes do. Performing it was always a glorious thing to do." **SS**



Jakszyk went from teenage fan to onstage player.

OLLY CURTIS/GUITARIST MAGAZINE/FUTURE OWNS

give it to John Wetton or to Robert Fripp to see what they do with it."

What Fripp ended up doing with Bruford's riff was to distil all his years of experience, skill and dexterity into one note played across two strings with some pitch bending for over four minutes, something that Steven Wilson would come to describe as "The death of prog solo." Adding to this already exciting brew was a bass riff that had originally been part of the early versions of Fripp's *Fracture*, written and performed during 1973. That fast-moving jazz-rock-style figure, propelled by the bass, provided the platform for the blowing/soloing section before the majestic recapitulation of the main theme brought the whole piece to a thunderous completion. Receiving its first live airing just days after the arrangements for all these separate instrumental sections had been hastily completed, *Starless* was a huge hit with the crowds — thanks in part to the simple but incredibly effective lighting cue that suffused the entire stage in an infernal, glowering crimson/red light as the piece relentlessly grew in power and magnitude over that memorable Bruford-composed bass line.

Unveiled at last: the KC boys on the album cover.

As Fripp noted in his diary after the band's last performance in New York's Central Park on July 1, 1974: "Lights at the end of *Starless* really blew the crowd. Rapturous reception… Everyone was pleased with the gig. Conversation with John Wetton — lighting effects like that really make the difference."

By the time they came to record *Starless* at Olympic Studios in July 1974 the remaining trio had played the song in concert more than 51 times. The fact that Crimson had at last been able to channel the raw energy of their live performances into the studio environment makes the finality of *Red* all the more poignant. That it was and remains such a powerful statement is all the more amazing considering what was going on under the psyche of the group.

As the sessions got underway, when Fripp told his colleagues that he was "withdrawing the passing of his opinion", and that his opinion didn't matter any more, Bruford and Wetton decided he was simply "pulling a moody", and got on with the task in hand. Fripp's approach was part of what he would later describe as a strategy of radical neutrality, "the doing nothing that enables doing everything". His not taking the initiative in the way he had done in previous recordings came in part as a response to reading JG Bennett's work and, during the weeks and months out of the road, a growing realisation that the madness and excesses of the music industry of which he'd been a part for five years were inimical with the life he wished to lead. The burden and responsibility of steering King Crimson along its own distinctive trajectory against the crosswinds of commerciality and artistic compromise was ultimately becoming too much for him.

His idea of taking a sabbatical and there being a Frippless King Crimson, but with Ian McDonald rejoining the group on a permanent basis, was discussed but ultimately nixed by EG Management, then already lining up another push in North America after *Red*'s release. Exhausted at the prospect of another year on the treadmill, Fripp increasingly saw the only way out was to put an end to the band. Very little of what was going on both on the inside and outside of Fripp's world was discussed with Bruford or Wetton.

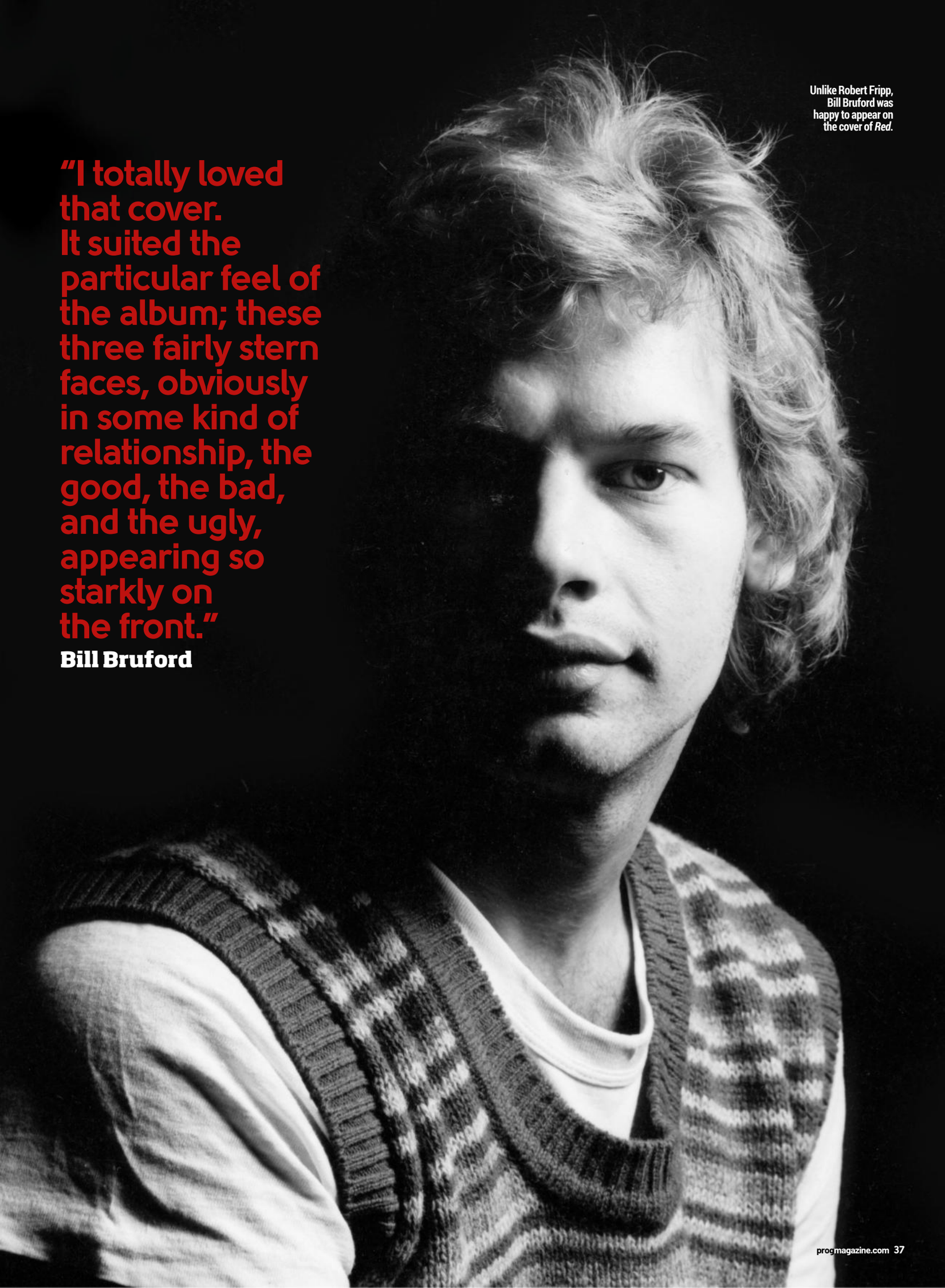
"I think it was probably very hard for them," Fripp reflects today.

Looking back on the making of *Red*, Bruford agrees with his ex-bandmate's assessment.

"It was *extremely* hard to deal with. But I also understand that if you impose these incredibly hard obstacles and hurdles to making something and people stay in the room, you might just get there. John and I stood our ground and said, 'All right.' Well, 'Sod that, we'll do whatever we can here to make something up out of this.' I think John and I were emotionally very, very involved in this.

"Finally, towards the end, it got down to the mixing and it was very much John and George Chkiantz who took the baby from the bathwater, wrapped it up and towelled it down. Giving birth to the thing was rough work. I'm glad Robert acknowledges that at least his radical neutrality was quite a creative stimulant."

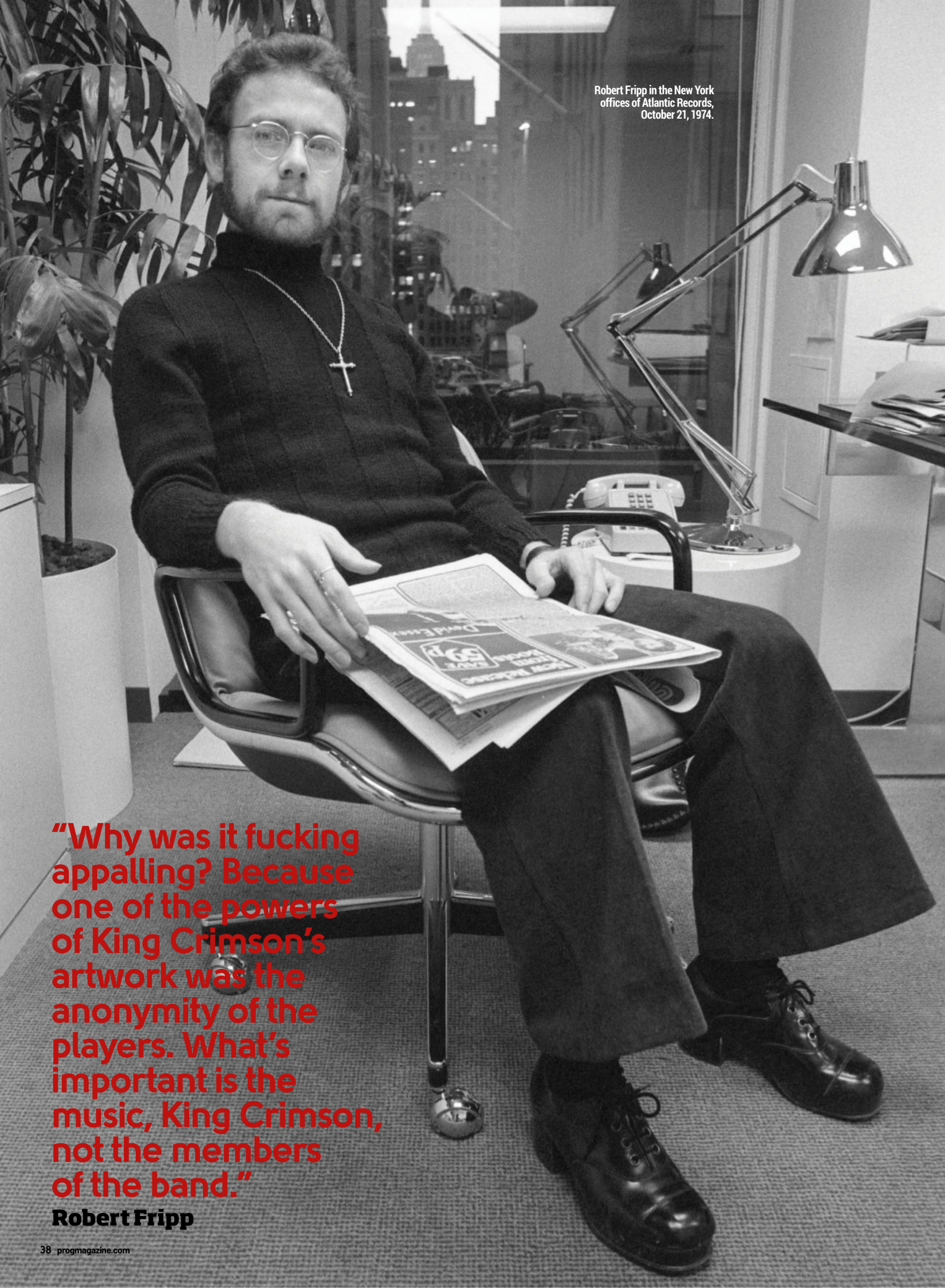
The power of the studio recording, with guesting players from the band's past, such as oboist Robin Miller, cornet player Mark Charig, Ian McDonald and Mel Collins, and subtle orchestral additions such as the cello on *Red* itself and the four double basses lending the coda extra dramatic



Unlike Robert Fripp, Bill Bruford was happy to appear on the cover of *Red*.

"I totally loved that cover. It suited the particular feel of the album; these three fairly stern faces, obviously in some kind of relationship, the good, the bad, and the ugly, appearing so starkly on the front."

**Bill Bruford**



Robert Fripp in the New York offices of Atlantic Records, October 21, 1974.

**"Why was it fucking appalling? Because one of the powers of King Crimson's artwork was the anonymity of the players. What's important is the music, King Crimson, not the members of the band."**

**Robert Fripp**

heft, is palpable. Even the chance discovery by Bruford of a 20-inch Zilket cymbal, upturned at one side like an Australian bush hat and discarded in a bin at Olympic, inadvertently became one of the defining sounds of the album. Even today, Fripp is in awe at what they managed to record.

"I was simply going with whatever was coming my way. And what was coming my way from John and Bill was startlingly impressive. When we actually played *Red*, the track, I remember Bill's playing…" Fripp pauses, momentarily lost in admiration. "It still defines the part with the wonderful cracked cymbal. I mean, fabulous stuff… Bill was at the height of his young powers, and for me, the most satisfying of Bill's drumming at any time in King Crimson was on the *Red* sessions."

If the aim of all that touring had been aimed at building momentum and visibility, it's no accident that *Red* was the first Crimson album to feature the band themselves on its front cover, something that EG Management and Wetton had pushed for. Coupled with the individual shots taken by Gered Mankowitz, who in a spooky coincidence had taken the publicity shots for Giles, Giles And Fripp six years earlier, Wetton came up with the idea to have the back cover photo of a VU meter crashing into the red-etched No.7, symbolising that this was the album that was going to push Crimson into the next level.

"I totally loved that cover," says Bruford. "It suited the particular feel of the album: these three fairly stern faces, obviously in some kind of relationship, the good, the bad, and the ugly, appearing so starkly on the front. It suited the entire vibe so very well."

For his part, Fripp hated it in 1974, but in keeping with his policy of radical neutrality, kept his misgivings to himself. These days, he's more forthcoming describing it as, "fucking appalling. Why was it fucking appalling? Because one of the powers of King Crimson's artwork was the anonymity of the players. What's important is the music, King Crimson, not the members of the band."

When asked to choose his favourite of the three studio albums released in the 1970s, John Wetton chose *Red* without any hesitation. It's the same for Bruford, who in recent years has been lecturing university students since gaining his doctorate in 2016, and notes that he has seen the appeal of the record, along with some of the others he was involved with half a century ago, finding favour with a younger audience.

"Quite why it has longevity, and these little albums somehow seem to become greater than they're supposed to be, is odd and something to do with cultural change, I think. Young people seem to appreciate the old stuff, parroting their parental opinion that the new stuff is over-processed, over-regulated, and corporate. *Red* seems to point in the direction in which music might be other than that, or continue to be other than that. In modern terms, it's fairly unprepossessing stuff. I mean, the album has five tracks, of which there are only three songs on it, the other two being instrumental. It is such a little album in many ways but it seems to have leapt out of its box of progressive rock and become greater than that."

After Crimson split in 1974, it was seven years before the title track got its first live outing as a surprise inclusion on the setlist of the 1980s incarnation. That though is nothing compared to the 40 years that elapsed before *Starless* was played again from 2014 onwards. This latter period of the band's life also saw *Fallen Angel* and *One More Red Nightmare*, both numbers for which Fripp harboured a particular affection for, finally make their live debut.

"All of the written pieces on *Red* were stunning," the guitarist says. "The Discipline quartet played *Red*, but not properly, in my view. We did a good version of it but didn't have the weight that the seven- and eight-piece had to bring to those pieces. *Red* was an instrumental, so you didn't need a vocalist. Jakko Jakszyk could deliver authentic versions of all that early material. Astonishingly good versions."

During that period when *Starless* was performed, it was common to see some audience members moved to tears.

"There were times playing it live where I was in tears," agrees Fripp.

One admittedly crude measure of the way the song has continued to grow and resonate with new audiences and generations alike are the 14 million hits of the 2015 live performance notched up on King Crimson's YouTube channel, easily outstripping *21st Century Schizoid Man* as King Crimson's most popular number. Fripp is at a loss to explain the track's mass popularity.

"I can't speak for the multitude who pile onto YouTube but I've said before, and I'll say it again — the musician doesn't write the music; *music* writes the musician. And if you're fortunate and manage to get yourself out of the way, sometimes music like that can happen."

*A 50th anniversary edition of Red will be released this autumn, featuring new mixes by Steven Wilson and David Singleton. The expanded vinyl edition of USA is out on June 28 via Panegyric. See www.dgmlive.com for more.*

## RED AND ME: PAT MASTELOTTO

### "I remember thinking, 'What is this thing?' It was indecipherable to my brain."

"I first saw King Crimson at the Cow Palace in San Francisco in June 1974. They opened for Ten Years After. They played a short set, but they played *Starless*. I know because I left with the bass riff and the coda going through my head for weeks after. I remember thinking, 'What is this thing?' It was indecipherable to my brain. Bruford would stand while he played the percussion over the two-note guitar solo, I remember. Then with that fast section of the coda, I couldn't count fast enough to understand what was happening. And then the show was over but that tune haunted me from then on. About two weeks later they played at the Shrine in LA. That's a big part of why I moved to LA, to be able to see Crimson again, and this time as headliners. I was way up in the nosebleeds at the Shrine but Crimson was fucking great. But again, I left with that *Starless* riff in my head. I even went back to my band and I tried to get them to play the big riff by trying to sing it to them a tune that I don't even really understand. [Laughs]

"Probably a whole year went by and by then I was living in an apartment in East Hollywood and my favourite record store was Moby Disc Records. They had two copies of *Red* in the import section. Crimson had split up by this time. So I buy a copy and shoot back to my apartment. I put the record on and then sat in the egg chair that used to hang on a rope from the ceiling in our apartment, lit a big joint and, man, I'm loving hearing it. When *Starless* came on I was like, 'Oh shit, here's that riff!' This was the thing that was fucking in my head for the last year.

"Decades later, I was talking to Tchad Blake, one of my favourite recording engineers, about working with King Crimson when we were recording *The Power To Believe* in 2002. He said something about how he loved *Red*, and he said, 'I was at Moby Disc Records and they only had one copy in the import section,' and I'm thinking, 'Dude, you probably got there just after me.'

"I played the title track *Red* with Crimson in the 90s with the Double Trio, and later in 2003 with the Double Duo, but it was great to finally be able to play *Fallen Angel* and *One More Red Nightmare* and, of course, *Starless*. I have so much emotional baggage with that number that can make it very difficult to play. My head's going down a little rabbit hole of emotional things that they kind of make it a struggle to pay attention to the actual idea that I'm participating with these other guys on the stage and in performance. That's how powerful *Starless* is. To me, it's like Samuel Barber's *Adagio*. I hear the opening bars of the Mellotron, and as soon as the melody comes in the tears come down. It's just like a faucet's been turned on." **SS**

Mastelotto was haunted by *Starless*'s main riff.

KEVIN NIXON/FUTURE OWNS

LEONARD M. DELESSIO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

# The Beat Goes On

There's a new King Crimson side-project in town, and this one focuses solely on the 80s incarnation of the group. **BEAT** finds Adrian Belew and Tony Levin reconnecting for a very special North American tour this autumn with guitar god Steve Vai and Tool drummer Danny Carey. *Prog* catches up with Levin and Belew to find out more.

**Words:** Andrew Daly
**Images:** Alison Dyer

When King Crimson mastermind Robert Fripp leaked curious details of BEAT in spring 2024, more than a few eyebrows were raised. The project celebrates King Crimson's 80s albums *Discipline* (1981), *Beat* (1982) and *Three Of A Perfect Pair* (1984).

Think of King Crimson and the mind's eye usually wanders to the band's 1969 masterpiece *In The Court Of The Crimson King*, or maybe one of their 70s classics. However, the early 80s was a time when Fripp cosied up alongside Adrian Belew, a former Frank Zappa, David Bowie and Talking Heads cohort; Tony Levin, who had spent the 70s undertaking everything from jazz to pop; and Bill Bruford, originally part of their early 70s line-up. It was a time to reinvent the wheel.

Things were so fresh and new that, according to Belew, it wasn't even supposed to be called King Crimson. "Originally, Robert called me when

> "Half of the excitement is not just playing this music - and the music of the 80s King Crimson deserves to be played more live and to have a tour around it."
>
> **Tony Levin**

I was touring Europe with Talking Heads, and in that phone call, he said that he and Bill Bruford would like to start a band with me. They weren't sure who the bass player would be, and it wasn't called King Crimson. Robert wanted to call it Discipline."

Eventually, a bass player was settled upon in the form of Tony Levin. Looking back, he says: "It was a fascinating collection of musicians back in 1980, or at the beginning of '81 when we got together to rehearse."

"I knew Robert's playing very well," Levin continues. "I played with him with Peter Gabriel and on Robert's solo album, *Exposure* [1979]. I didn't know Adrian and Bill; I wasn't even an expert on the history of King Crimson. But I got in this room in downtown New York to rehearse and see about maybe forming a band. I heard three extraordinary players who are not only great musicians, but when you think about it, each one is utterly unique on his instrument."

Things might have been tentative at first, but the natural chemistry of the situation took hold, leading to the realisation that while this

A new BEAT for King Crimson vibes.

incarnation might be different from the 70s heyday, this new collection of musicians needed to call themselves King Crimson.

"With Tony, now we had two Americans," Belew recalls. "We started playing together; we holed up for about six weeks in the middle of nowhere. There was nothing to do but try to learn and write new stuff.

"Eventually Tony and I said, 'We really don't love the name Discipline.' It implies something different; maybe it's not a very friendly term in America. One day Robert walked in and said, 'Whatever we call this band, it has the spirit of King Crimson.' And I stood up and said, 'Let's call it King Crimson.' Because that meant a lot to me, King Crimson; I knew all of their previous work and always felt that they were a band on a very high level. I would be proud to be in that band."

Levin recalls feeling the same way, though he knew the bar would have to be raised. "I quickly saw that my work was cut out for me with this combination. I thought, 'If I'm going to be trying to keep up with these guys, I have to not only give my best to the music but also explore my voice.'"

History demonstrates that Fripp, Belew, Levin and Bruford did find their voice. The result was a trio of records that, while not on the tip of some prog fans' tongues and completely out of place in the 80s, have found a steady cult following over the years.

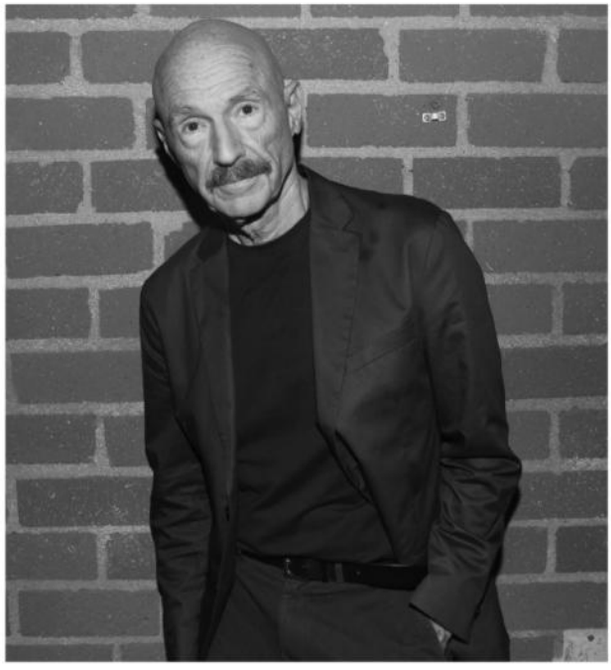
"I think the original King Crimson stuff attracted a certain audience," Belew says. "It was very English in its approach: the lyrics were very floral and they were large, epic arrangements. But our thing was completely different: very modern, new wave and African-influenced. And the singer wasn't going to sing in that same style because I'm not English; it would be stupid."

Levin laughs and adds, "We were together so much in that incarnation that we co-composed the pieces in a room together. There wasn't too much going off the rails and experimentation; we just reacted to the music."

It's been 40 years since *Three Of A Perfect Pair* concluded King Crimson's 80s era, and just as many years since the foursome played their final shows. Fripp has kept at it and Levin weaved his way in and out of Crimson, recalling those years as "a great place for research and development, and trying ideas that just would not work with any other band."

As for Belew, he's kept busy, too. But not so busy that he wasn't interested in reliving the glory days of 80s Crimson. In 2019, he got the itch to celebrate his time alongside Fripp, leading him to call his old bandmate.

"I realised that the 40th anniversary of King Crimson, when I joined it in 1981, was just a couple of years away. I felt like we should do something to celebrate it, even if we just did some shows, not even a whole tour."



**Belew (top) wanted a 40th anniversary reunion; while Levin (above) says he's prepared to be "kicked in the butt" by his bandmates.**

Belew recalls, "I called Robert Fripp and asked what he thought. We talked for a good while, a good conversation. He said, 'I'd like to think about it.' The next day, he emailed me and gave me a list of reasons why he could not do it.

"He had a lot of plans for the next three years at that time, so he declined. I called Bill Bruford, and he declined. So I knew that I couldn't do anything with the original four-piece band."

But Belew wasn't done yet. If he couldn't reunite 80s Crimson, he'd do the next best thing: call Steve Vai, Tony Levin and Danny Carey. Getting these busy musicians with wild schedules to say yes was one thing but making it a reality was another.

"Since I was hot on the idea of King Crimson, I started brainstorming whether or not we could do it ourselves somehow. My first thought was, 'We need someone who can cover Robert's parts,' which is pretty impossible to do. The only person I could think of was Steve Vai. I learned from an interview that Steve Vai loved those records, and Robert in particular. I thought, 'Maybe there's a chance.' I was in the grocery store parking lot, called Steve and to my surprise, he was excited and confident that he could do it."

With Vai now on board, Belew still needed to wait for Levin's schedule to clear. "Things halted after Covid hit, and for two years nothing happened. But after five years, Tony was finally available. He was my only choice as a bass player. With Tony, we had half the band, but we still needed a drummer."

Replacing Bill Bruford, an idiosyncratic drummer with a penchant for a deep yet jazzy pocket, would be no easy feat. Thankfully, a godsend from the modern prog world dropped into Belew's lap.

"I knew Danny Carey should be the guy from the start," Belew says.

BEAT, L-R: Tony Levin, Steve Vai, Adrian Belew, Danny Carey.

"Danny had told me that he was a fan of those records and knew a ton about Bill's playing, so I went to see him in Nashville. By then, I'd gotten the OK to ask him, and he just flipped out. He was so happy but still needed to clear it with his family and Tool. So, thankfully, Tool was taking some time away from touring and going into writing mode, and his family was very much into it, so there you go!"

The idea of any line-up besting Fripp, Belew, Levin and Bruford is hard to imagine, but Belew, Vai, Levin and Carey are pretty damn formidable. Still, 80s Crimson had inherent chemistry, and reimagining that won't be easy, but Levin thinks they're up to the challenge.

"I think there is always chemistry among good players. When good players get together, some kind of chemistry comes, for sure. I can't say what it will feel like; I really can't tell you until we get into a room. I'm experienced in that I've played in a lot of bands, but I'm wise enough to know I've got I hear this [before judging]. I can't say, 'This guy's playing is going to be this way or that way.' We'll see."

Belew doesn't seem too concerned, either. "With this band, I'm not too worried about anything else from my seat, except that it's a lot of songs to sing. So I'm already trying to physically get myself in peak shape, whatever that means. I'm working out and I've stopped having alcohol, and I started eating better. We're gonna make sure this is 1,000 per cent."

**"We have to go out and establish ourselves and see if we're the real deal for the long term, or are we just something that is going to happen, some people will see it, and it'll be done. I hope that doesn't happen because I'd like to see us go around the world."**
**Adrian Belew**

Levin adds, "And that's the fun of it. Half of the excitement is not just playing this music — and the music of the 80s King Crimson deserves to be played more live and to have a tour around it. I know it'll be exciting and challenging. I expect to be kicked in the butt by the technical expertise of the three guys onstage with me, and that's great."

Taking their name from the original quartet's second album, BEAT are gearing up for their North American shows, which open in San Jose, California on September 12 and are planned to conclude on November 8 in Las Vegas, Nevada. There's talk of more, including European and UK dates, though nothing is finalised yet. But the big question on everyone's mind right now is whether new music will manifest out of this thing.

"I believe that's possible," Belew says. "But there's no way to know right now. I'm surprised at how excited Steve Vai is. He's the one I was concerned about because he does a lot of touring, but I think he's starting to see that this is something he'd like to do more than less. Steve keeps telling me how beautiful the music is and what a challenge it is for him. But it's one that he wants to do, and Danny's in the same boat. And then there's Tony and me, who would like to do this as much as possible."

A beaming Levin chimes in, "One hopes. If I've learned anything about doing interviews, it's not to predict because I'm wrong so often [laughs]. So, one hopes; I hope there will be more stuff next year with this band because it deserves that."

For the BEAT project, the future is bright yet uncertain. And that's kind of fitting when you consider King Crimson's off-kilter yet magical nature. For now, Adrian Belew, Steve Vai, Tony Levin and Danny Carey will embark on a journey to celebrate King Crimson's 80s era as four musical titans doing something out of pure love and sharing utter joy through creation.

"I'm excited for it," says Levin. "But the guys are very busy, so we'll see. But if you're asking me, yeah, there's the desire to do more in the future. We'll see where it can go musically beyond those first 40 shows."

Belew, Levin's on-and-off cohort of over 40 years, nods in agreement.

"New music… that's far off. We first have to go out and establish ourselves and see if we're the real deal for the long term, or are we just something that is going to happen, some people will see it, and it'll be done. I hope that doesn't happen because I'd like to see us go around the world."

*See www.BEAT-tour.com for more information.*

**“My premise behind writing: there’s a song I want to hear and no one else has written it, so I might as well do it.”**

Wakeman is a prog powerhouse.

# Soul Trader

It's been a long time coming, but **Oliver Wakeman** is back with a new solo album. With contributions from Nightwish's Troy Donockley, vocalist Hayley Griffiths, and Pendragon drummer Scott Higham, *Anam Cara* is a celtic-flavoured melting pot of delight. The keyboardist discusses the good stories and wonderful musicians that make up a record he hopes will capture the listener's imagination.

**Words:** Grant Moon **Images:** Max Clarke

Last year Oliver Wakeman's record label politely pointed out that he hadn't made an album of his own for a long, long time. He was taken aback; to him it felt like he'd barely stopped releasing music.

There was *Collaborations* — the 2022 box set featuring expanded reissues of *The 3 Ages Of Magick*, his record with Steve Howe, and *Ravens & Lullabies*, with Gordon Giltrap. The year before saw *Tales By Gaslight*, a three-disc set comprising his albums with Arena's Clive Nolan — *Jabberwocky* and *The Hound Of The Baskervilles* plus a previously unreleased selection, *Dark Fables*. In 2019 there'd been a high-profile offering — Yes 'mini-album' *From A Page*, predominantly made up of shelved pieces the keyboardist had written for the band during his tenure with them in the late 2000s. Add to that the live work with Strawbs, the occasional charity gig with his old man, Rick Wakeman, and hundreds of other engagements.

"In my head," Wakeman tells *Prog*, "I'd been doing records and sessions for the last 10 years, since working with Gordon on *Ravens*.... The record company said, 'Yeah, but you haven't done one of your *own*.' But I never think about that. Every record I do is as important to me as a solo record. And in an odd way, this new one is a solo record, but it's not really — it's me with a bunch of musicians that I really like working with."

*Anam Cara* is the first album released under just his name since 2005's rocky *Mother's Ruin*, but it benefits greatly from notable contributors on both sides of the studio glass. Recorded by John Mitchell and mixed by Threshold's Karl Groom, the record's celtic feel is enhanced by the uilleann pipes and whistles of Nightwish's brilliant Troy Donockley, and lyrical violin from Telergy's Robert McClung. Alongside Wakeman's long-time electric guitarist David Mark Pearce, Oliver Day (Amy Birks, Yes tribute band Fragile) adds classy acoustic guitars, lute and mandolin. Due to a quirk of fate, seasoned sessioneer Scott Higham recorded most of his drum parts for the record in, of all places, Clive Nolan's lounge.

The album title is derived from a Gaelic term that translates as 'soul friend', and its 10 songs tell stories of the characters' interactions with others, and themselves.

"I thought 'Anam Cara' was a wonderful description of these relationships," Wakeman explains. "These soul friends can be good or bad, they could be the internal relationships you have with yourself. It also matched well with the relationships musicians have with each other. You often meet other musicians who you haven't known for years, but you end up having an intimate trust

Oliver Wakeman, weaver of tales.

of each other. As a writer, I'm trusting these people to deliver something that is going to enhance the piece of music. I felt the title covered that as well."

Drawing on the strands of prog, rock, folk and new age music woven into the 52 year-old's output, *Anam Cara* is marked by some extraordinary instrumental prowess, but ultimately it's a collection of female vocal-led songs so Wakeman needed a versatile, powerful vocalist. Enter Hayley Griffiths, known well in these parts for her work with Karnataka and her own band. The two were introduced by their mutual friend, Touchstone's Adam Hodgson.

"She was great," says Wakeman. "Some of these songs are traditional songs of longing, or about the challenge of relationships. But some are short stories, historical stories, stories of abandonment — all these different emotions. I needed a vocalist who could sing like an angel, who could go into classical, soprano-type stuff, but who could also add gravel to their voice, give it a bit of welly when the band is let loose. I haven't come across many people that can do that, and Hayley can. One minute she can sound like the most wise, mature person in the way she's projecting a song; the next minute she can sound angry, then sweet and light. It's quite wonderful. She did a fantastic job."

One of the standout tracks, *The Queen's Lament*, sees Griffiths portray the young Catherine Howard as she awaits her executioner, having been caught in a dalliance behind the back of her husband, Henry VIII. Oliver was painfully aware of what the reaction might be, given the already strong connection between the Tudors and the Wakemans.

"I really love the song but I struggled with the fact that the Wakeman name is so renowned, through Dad doing his *The Six Wives Of Henry VIII* album. I thought, 'Do I really want to put this out there?'"

It's a good thing he did — the song's cleverly composed, beautifully produced and stands on its own merits.

When the Wakemans meet up, Oliver says the topic of conversation is much more likely to be comedy or cars than keyboards.

"In our family, everybody [including younger brother, Adam] does music," says Oliver. "It'd be a bit like talking shop so we just don't do it. I like that we talk about other things."

It's actually elsewhere on *Anam Cara* that this proggy apple seems to have fallen closest to the tree. As well as the robust musical spine underpinning the entire endeavour, the gene is present in the rip-roaring blues piano coda of upbeat break-up tune *Instead Of My Fear*, and the dextrous Moog solos of the opulent *Here In My Heart*, country-tinged *Miss You Now* and dramatic *Lonely*. This latter keyboard break is all the more thrilling for its thematic connection to the story, about someone who has, its writer says, "gone off, become a musician and followed their dreams. We only get one life, you've got to sort of follow some of your passions somewhere. That's why that piece suddenly goes all over the top."

One of *Anam Cara*'s most evocative and cinematic moments, *Marble Arch* is based on a story Wakeman wrote as a youngster. It's a tale of two foreign spies vying for the secrets of a British scientist, leading to a love affair, betrayal and a violent death; it could easily be expanded into a novel befitting Graham Greene or John le Carré. Musically, it presents a man waiting all night for a woman under the titular arch, then down to a subterranean jazz club (with some sensational playing from the band, notably saxophonist Mick Allport) and then back again. The windswept, celtic-flavoured closer *Golden Sun In Grey* is another lovelorn tale effectively told, as a woman waits in vain for the return of the sailor whose baby she's carrying.

**"I needed a vocalist who could sing like an angel, who could go into classical, soprano-type stuff, but who could also add gravel to their voice, give it a bit of welly when the band is let loose."**

Having a good story is one thing but, Wakeman says, "if you've also got a good melody, and if you use your instruments in the right way to enhance the emotional pull, then you've got something that's particularly exciting. One of the songs I loved as a kid was It Bites' *Plastic Dreamer* [from 1988's *Once Around The World*]. The idea of being in a toy shop and all the toys coming to life — I remember thinking it was fantastic. I'm just a bit of a magpie. I love music. My son always says to me, 'Why did you write that song?' And I say, 'Because no one else had.' And that's my premise behind writing: there's a song I want to hear and no one else has written it, so I might as well do it."

Wakeman, Griffiths, Day, Higham and Magenta bassist Dan Nelson played pieces from *Anam Cara* and *From A Page* at Winter's End Festival in April. If this record goes down well, Wakeman has his eyes on more live shows, with a full band.

"If I had the budget that'd be a wonderful show to do. *Anam Cara* is a record I wanted to write that I thought had some good stories, some wonderful musicians on it, and that might capture people's imagination. That's what I'm hoping for."

*Anam Cara is out now via Spirit Of Unicorn Music. See www.oliverwakeman.co.uk for more information.*

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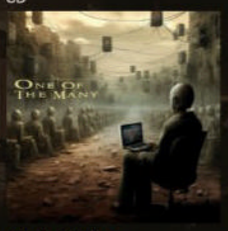

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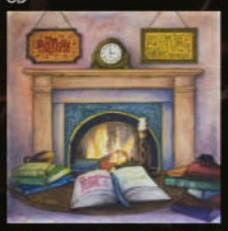

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# A Traveller Of Time And Space

The good rocketship **Hawkwind** have launched their 36th studio album into the progosphere! On *Stories From Time And Space*, the group have lost none of their sense of injustice about the world. Bandleader Dave Brock reveals the drive behind their new music, why he's continuing to fight for an alternative society and responds to recent concerns about his health.

**Words:** Julian Marszalek **Images:** Dale Cherry

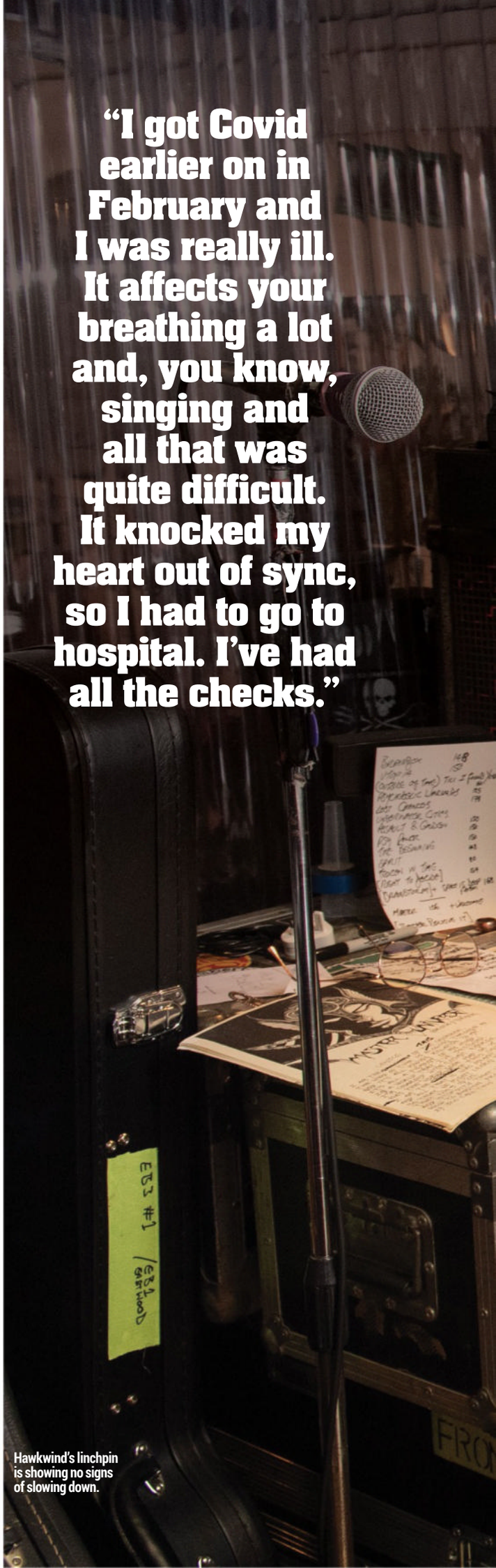
Ask any musician what the highlight of their recent tour might be and the answers will invariably range from positive crowd reaction to the new material, through to a hospitality rider that includes a decent feed as much as libation, perhaps Wi-Fi that works or even just good old camaraderie in the tour bus. For Dave Brock, linchpin of the venerable space rock institution that is Hawkwind, it's all of these things and more, not least as the six-date tour that he recently completed in support of the band's 36th album, *Stories From Time And Space* very nearly didn't happen.

"It was quite hard going because prior to that, I had just come out of hospital," recalls Brock as he talks to *Prog* from his farmhouse in Devon. "I got Covid earlier on in February and I was really ill. It affects your breathing a lot and, you know, singing and all that was quite difficult. It knocked my heart out of sync, so I had to go to hospital. I've had all the checks."

Much like the stoic generation of which he's a member, 82-year-old Brock isn't one to dwell on what might have been or what he had to go through to get match fit, so we'll draw a discreet veil over his recuperation. Instead, he's more interested in how the tour developed and how his enforced hospitalisation actually brought out the best in his bandmates – that'll be guitarist-singer Magnus Martin, keyboardist Tim 'Thighpaulsandra' Lewis, bassist Doug Mackinnon and longtime drummer Richard Chadwick.

"I started getting better as I went along," Brock reassures airily. "The band had been rehearsing without me for all of March. And because they didn't know if I was going to be able to do it or not, they'd been practising all their vocals. The good thing was, all of them can sing. Some of them say they can't sing, but they really can.

**"I got Covid earlier on in February and I was really ill. It affects your breathing a lot and, you know, singing and all that was quite difficult. It knocked my heart out of sync, so I had to go to hospital. I've had all the checks."**



Hawkwind's linchpin is showing no signs of slowing down.

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So, when I came back, we had really good backing vocals!"

Not only is Dave Brock pleased with the way the tour went, he's also thrilled by the reaction the new material has been receiving. Rarely looking in the rear-view mirror, it's precisely this attitude that's ensured the continuation of Hawkwind's late-period purple patch that began with the eerily prescient *The Machine Stops* in 2016. And with *Stories From Time And Space*, the band have consolidated their strengths — melodies that burrow their way into the brain with insistent riffs, instrumental workouts aplenty and driven by the allegory of science fiction — to keep moving forward, which gives them the opportunity to bend their new songs this way and that, helping them take their place in the band's ever-increasing pantheon.

"I'd hate to just constantly play the old numbers," stresses Brock. "We do lots of new numbers, and the more you play them, the more they change and the more interesting they become. Some of the stuff that we've been doing just before we do *Brainstorm* started off at maybe about four minutes. And now you can play it for about eight or 10 because it's got more interesting.

**Hawkwind, L-R: Magnus Martin, Dave Brock, Thighpaulsandra, Doug MacKinnon, Richard Chadwick.**

People feel more comfortable with it and we can go off on tangents."

"You've got to get the balance," he adds. "You can't just rely on your old material because the music is going forward."

Hawkwind's sonic attack, along with their fabled and gloriously intense light show, is also pulling through a new generation of fans in its slipstream, a fact that tickles Dave Brock pink.

"We do actually get quite a few young fans, and that's a good thing," he says with no little pride. "We've got a really good fanbase, and they actually travel around. A lot of them come every night and a lot of them bring their families and kids on tour. It's really good fun!"

Crucially, even after 55 years of playing and recording, Hawkwind still manage the high-wire balancing act that has entertainment on one side and something to say on the other. A visceral and occasionally disorientating experience that's left its mark on scenes as disparate as psychedelia and rave, Hawkwind are mindful not to churn it out for the sake of it.

"What you're doing is you're entertaining people," reasons Brock. "The objective of music is an escapism for people to enjoy themselves. We've got a really good laser light show, we've got a really good back projection. The guys who do all our stuff want it to be a wonderful show. And so the audience come along wanting to be taken off into a big trip and a wonderful experience, really. That's what musicians want to do. They want to entertain people and make it a wonderful experience. And if you perform really well, they'll go, 'Wow! That was a really fantastic evening!' That's what you do it for."

But underpinning that entertainment is Hawkwind's central and long-standing opposition to the mainstream. Brock and his bandmates aren't simply trotting out the old numbers and blending them with the new; this is the continuation of a journey that began more than half a century ago in the urban squalor of Ladbroke Grove and Notting Hill, and honed to perfection as the de facto house band of the free-festival 'freak' scene of the 70s and 80s. Their abhorrence of the political elite and the institutions that keep them there remains firmly in place and beats at the heart of their oeuvre.

"The same things occur," says Brock with a sigh. "You know, doing *The Psychedelic Warlords (Disappear In Smoke)*: *'Sick of politicians, harassment and laws/*

**"It's a nice line-up at the moment. We all get on and we don't have any arguments. We work on things as a group because that's what a band's supposed to be: a unit of people coming together."**

*All we do is get screwed up by other people's flaws.'* The words mean the same thing as they did many years ago. You do songs about situations and you think, 'Crikey! Fifty years on, and nothing's really changed.' Unfortunately, it's getting worse."

Warming to the theme, Brock continues, "You know *We Took The Wrong Step Years Ago*? That was influenced by Rachel Carson, who wrote [an environmental science] book in the 60s called *Silent Spring* and she actually wrote all about pollution. It's an interesting book to read. And now you look at the amount of sewage and dumping that's going on in the rivers now. Years and years ago, we used to go swimming down where we live here and we all became ill. We all thought we had flu, but it was the bloody water! We found out that there was a slurry pit about a mile down the river, which was leaking into the river. Eventually, the farmer got fined £5,000 for leaking his slurry into the river and polluting the river and all the fish died. This is happening on a huge scale now. The water companies are more interested in making money instead of investing."

Turning his ire to the ill-fated HS2 project, he continues, "I mean, look at the stupid railway system. Do we really need to spend all this money on a high-speed train going to Birmingham? Billions and billions of pounds wasted and all those people who have lost their homes because of it; it's all wasted time. We have no control, I don't think, anymore. So we write songs about it."

Despite the passing of the years, Dave Brock insists that he's still making music for the same reasons that he always has — though the causes may have changed over the years, Hawkwind are here to highlight them as they continually struggle against oppression and fighting for the possibility of an alternative society.

"We were younger when we were doing the free festivals and as you get older you slow down a bit," says Brock as he compares the campaigning and agitation of the 70s to the present day. "But we do lots of stuff constantly for animal charities to bring attention to what was going on, you know, like dogs being kidnapped and having ransoms demanded for them. A dog to a family of people with kids is part of that family and they're living entities. I mean, there's so much going on all around the world that you try and bring attention to certain things."

So, while Hawkwind's commitment to an alternative way of life is as solid as ever, their use of psychedelic substances as a means of composing music and fuel for their belief system and lifestyle has long been shelved.

"At our age in life?" chuckles Brock at the notion of LSD being on the creative menu. "I think when you're younger, you can accommodate these things. You don't have to take them forever. Once you've opened the doors of perception, you can see what's going on, and therefore you don't have to take drugs anymore, because you've got the ideas."

He adds sagely, "And remember the saying: 'A little is always better than too much.'"

In fact, the only chemistry that interests Brock at this stage of Hawkwind's career is the one that exists between the band's principal players. Not for them the internecine fighting and drug and alcohol problems that blighted previous line-ups — as Brock points out, now it's all about the joy of making music as a coherent and focused unit.

"It's a nice line-up at the moment," he says proudly. "We all get on and we don't have any arguments. We work on things as a group because that's what a band's supposed to be: a unit of people coming together."

Brock is full of praise of Hawkwind's current incarnation: "Richard's been our drummer now for [nearly] 40 years. Doug's a really good bass player and when you've got a really solid rhythm section, you can go off into different areas. Tim [Thighpaulsandra] is really good on the synths and Magnus can double up on the keyboards and the guitar. And, like I say, now everybody comes to the fore and can sing. And to think they tried not to do it for so long!"

But, what of the work in progress with famed dance and electronics producer William Orbit? As revealed in *Prog* 146, Hawkwind have already begun recording their next album, though Orbit's production commitment to the project hasn't been as exclusive as might have been desired.

"He's in Jamaica recording a reggae artist who is in prison," laughs Brock. "He wanted me to do some synthesiser on that. I think that's what he's up to at the moment. I've got a lot of his stuff that he sent me, and he's got some of ours. He's quite busy at the moment."

Brock chuckles again, revelling in the time and space he's afforded himself.

"We have just come back from touring, so who knows what's gonna happen next?"

And with that, Dave Brock looks ahead to the future once more.

***Stories From Time And Space* is out now.**

*Stories From Time And Space is out now via Cherry Red. See www.hawkwind.com for more information.*

# Where Words Are Not (Always) Needed

[Mostly] without lyrics to underscore their song's meanings, post-rock trio **Sleepmakeswaves** have learnt to find the beauty in the "translational chasm" that exists between artist and listener. They've poured themselves into their fifth album, *It's Here, But I Have No Names For It*, and now they're excited for their fans to find themselves, and not its creators, reflected in its music. *Prog* caught up with the band to find out more.

**Words:** Phil Weller
**Images:** Declan Blackall

Poster boys, Sleepmakeswaves.

> "I think we've all got tired of the very relentlessly serious posture of post-rock. Ultimately this is about entertainment and fun."
> **Alex Wilson**

On 2020's *These Are Not Your Dreams*, Australian post-rock trio Sleepmakeswaves threw caution to the wind. Swerving producers and deadlines, they did things on their own terms. For a band that guitarist Otto Wicks-Green says are "always learning", that process left them with plenty to consider for its follow-up. Multi-instrumentalist Alex Wilson traces the record's origins back to the global shutdown that resulted in a wealth of material, which the band will continue to work through in the years ahead.

"We were suited to being confined to our home studios," says Wilson today. "We wrote close to two hours' worth of material during that period."

"We've been in situations before where we've been pushed against a hard deadline and felt the pressure of needing to complete material," Wicks-Green responds. "We'd be freaking out that we didn't have enough material or start second-guessing it. This was the opposite. We wrote the hell out of ourselves."

Of all the lessons learnt from *These Are Not Your Dreams*, brevity was key. Despite releasing it as a trio of EPs, the band found that fans and media still called it an album. Consequently, Wicks-Green says they "decided to embrace that and make a really punchy album in the classic style of two 20-minute sides.

"One thing we did really like about that was the opportunity to really stretch out and explore some different ways of being a post-rock band," the guitarist reflects. "I wouldn't particularly call it focused; it was all over the shop and I think people found that charming about us. Having had the opportunity to explore with *...Dreams* and not be answerable to a producer or studio clock, we could put all that experimentation and experience into a more focused process."

To ensure focus ruled the recording's roost, the band established a clear democratic approval process. An idea could only ever be furthered if Wilson, Wicks-Green and drummer Tim Adderley were able to justify it.

"We got more confident that we could work as kind of a three-headed self-producer," Wilson recalls. "We relied on someone incredible to mix the record [Andrei Eremin, Closure In Moscow], and we got assistance with the orchestrations [from Simeon Bartholomew of eccentric math rockers Seims]. I think all those things enhanced the product, but for better or for worse, we ultimately put it upon ourselves to work through the writing process democratically.

"That is by nature a hard and frustrating process," he extends. "We're all getting older and crankier, and we're all getting

L-R: Alex Wilson, Otto Wicks-Green, Tim Adderley.

**"Having had the opportunity to explore with ...*Dreams* and not be answerable to a producer or studio clock, we could put all that experimentation and experience into a more focused process."**
**Otto Wicks-Green**

more opinionated. That's the ups and downs of creativity."

"I learned a lot from Alex and Tim," Wicks-Green returns. "They have more experience in the production world, but I was more confident putting a third of the producer's hat on this time. There are elements of *These Are Not Your Dreams* where I could have been more minimal in my approach: I got better at knowing when enough was enough and let a part speak for itself. It was great to have these guys alongside for the journey and keep my big dumb imaginative ideas in check."

Once more, the band have poured tireless care and consideration into the meanings behind their songs. However, they've learnt that, in the absence of lyrics, that messaging doesn't always come across — and that's no bad thing.

"Ultimately, we have to accept that people are going to read into our material what they wish to imagine in it," says Wilson. "There's always going to be a translational chasm between us and the audience.

"We experience things in our lives very deeply and we deal with those experiences by making post-rock music. I'm someone who's moved by the notes and rhythms in music. I'm more likely to walk around the house going [imitates drum noises] than singing a lyric, because it's the beats and the textures that connect with me. I think I've always had trust that putting emotion into musical notes and rhythms and structures, and doing that sincerely, is a form of communication that's going to be received gratefully and in a good spirit by listeners who are on that wavelength. I'm very comfortable with the fact that people will have their own choice about how they relate to the songs.

"It's a perfect segue into why we named the album *It's Here, But I Have No Names For It*," adds Wicks-Green. "It's a line from the book *Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert M Pirsig. He's gesturing towards this concept that there are some things we can't name and we shouldn't try to, as it reduces your personal experience with it.

"That really resonated with us because we're trying to do that with our music. We can try to engineer it to some extent, but people are going to experience it in their own way. And I think that the title is a nod to that sort of surrender, where it's like, 'After this, it's up to you.'"

There are points where the new record gets heavy. They're blended with their serious, deeply emotional turns, and lighthearted breaths of air for a wonderfully dynamic affair.

"As much as we have the desire to do this sincere emotional stuff, we all still really like big dumb rock music," Wilson explains.

"Otto and Tim got into a really good rhythm during the writing, where Otto would write some riffs in the spirit of 'This is probably pretty dumb, but have a listen anyway'," Wilson extends.

"In the case of *All Hail Skull* and *Ritual Control*, Tim knew there was something in those ideas and was really good at beating them into shape. It became a bit of a Hetfield/Ulrich [frontman/drummer from Metallica] dynamic."

Although listeners may dive deep into these instrumental tomes to find their own meanings and stories, *All Hail Skull* is in fact named after a pink Halloween decoration that was "glowing and buzzing away" while Otto knocked out riffs in his home studio. There's no deeper level to it, but that doesn't mean their fans can't find one, should they want to.

***It's Here, But I Have No Names For It* is out now.**

"I think we've all got tired of the very relentlessly serious posture of post-rock," Wilson underscores. "Ultimately this is about entertainment and fun. Hopefully that gives permission for people to enjoy the stuff that's enjoyable, and connect with the things that they find significant if they want to."

Following on from *...Dreams* song *Zelda*, the band's first song to feature vocals, both *Terror Future* and the record's title track buck their previously staunch instrumental trend here. The freedom granted from *...Dreams* meant they felt less precious about going against their self-made grain.

"With *Terror Future* it was the idea of digitising the voice and looping it so that it felt like a texture rather than a lead instrument," says Wicks-Green. "With the title track, having vocals felt like it lifted that section in a very natural way. We never want to feel like we're arbitrarily jamming a vocal performance over the top of a song that doesn't need it. It's got to make sense for us at a deep level, and in both of those cases it really did."

Having exhaustively turned two hours of material into a concise but diverse and rich listening experience, the band are excited to return to what's left over. They've already carved out a plan for two upcoming releases, which will focus on different extremities of their sound.

"The people who don't like the vocals are going to be really bothered by our incredibly awesome alternative rock songs," says Wilson laughing. "It's going to be very straight down the line. Then the stuff that will come subsequently will be an attempt to do again something that is a bit more experimental. That's the beauty of writing with no time constraints — we get to muck around and write some really interesting stuff."

*It's Here, But I Have No Names For It is out now via Bird's Robe and Dunk!records. Head to www.sleepmakeswaves.com for more information.*

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# Lone Star

On **The Tangent**'s 14th album, *To Follow Polaris*, Andy Tillison has embarked on a "one-off" solo adventure that tackles self-doubt and finds him going on a quest for The Truth. *Prog* catches up with the multi-instrumentalist as he ponders whether we're better off without the internet and finds out why he still remains optimistic in a world full of turmoil.

**Words:** Dom Lawson **Images:** Chris Walkden

One of the most reliable and prolific prog bands of the 21st century, The Tangent are nothing if not adaptable. Two years on from *Songs From The Hard Shoulder,* these revered veterans are about to release a record with one significant difference. Defying the odds and proving himself to be an even more talented man than his many past achievements might suggest, founder and songwriter Andy Tillison has pulled off the impressive feat of creating an entire album without any help from his bandmates whatsoever. Dedicated fans shouldn't panic, however, as this cherished keyboard wizard hasn't fallen out with his fellow musicians. He just couldn't get them all in the same room to bring his new songs to life, and so he did it all himself.

As he explains to *Prog, To Follow Polaris* is the product of circumstance and, more specifically, the fact that comrades bassist Jonas Reingold and guitarist Luke Machin are so absurdly talented that they're nearly always in demand by other bands and projects, including Steve Hackett's touring band (Reingold) and Karnataka (Machin).

"I've never been quite sure why it happened this way," says Tillison with a laugh. He's speaking over the phone from his isolated base on the Yorkshire Moors. "But I've had some really great musicians in my project over the years, and they've all been so keen and generally amazing, and I feel very lucky. And of course, they are in demand, because they're really good! I'm certainly not one to stop them going out and earning some money, so there's no animosity towards that at all. This whole thing of making an album alone has nothing to do with any dissatisfaction on my part. I love working with the band, and I particularly like the guys that are in the group at the moment. So this is a one-off experiment, really. It's something I've always wanted to do."

***To Follow Polaris* is a treat for the ears.**

Despite having created an entire set of new songs by himself, Tillison is eager to point out that *To Follow Polaris* is still a Tangent album, and not some indulgent solo venture. Seventy-five minutes long and full of the sprawling, intricate epics that have been his band's trademark over the last 22 years, it fits neatly into their catalogue. More importantly, it keeps the creative ball rolling for a man that seems incapable of *not* writing a lavish double album every couple of years.

"I did consider putting it out as a solo artist, but I feel if I was going to be doing a solo album, I'd like to do something that wasn't a Tangent

**"I was thinking, 'Will anybody care? Will anyone like this? Will people think it's crap because the rest of the band aren't on it?' I'm sure there will be some people who say that, but will it please the majority of Tangent fans?"**

record, if you know what I mean," Tillison shrugs. "I do release records under my own name, and they're not like Tangent records. They're more jazz fusion, or in a Tangerine Dream or Klaus Schulze mode. It's a very small part of my career. The brand name that I work with is The Tangent and this is definitely in that mould. I talked to the rest of the band and said, 'Can I do this?' and they said, 'Of course!' and were very supportive."

Fans of The Tangent's work over the last two decades will have grown accustomed to very high standards of musicianship, both from the current line-up and the numerous incarnations that have preceded it. (No fewer than 30 former members are listed on the band's Wikipedia page, many of them significant figures in their own right.) As a result, the decision to play everything himself presented a number of fresh challenges that Andy Tillison was obliged to overcome.

**"I love working with the band, and I particularly like the guys that are in the group at the moment. So this is a one-off experiment, really. It's something I've always wanted to do."**

"I write an album for The Tangent, and then we reach the point where we usually hand off to the group, and they put their mark on it," he says. "I had that moment with this album as well. There came this point where once I'd done the keyboard demos, I had to hand things off to me as a bassist, as a guitarist and as a drummer. One of the things I am quite good at, is what I look at as musical method acting, so I try to *become* the guitarist. It's not just me picking up a guitar and playing. I start to take on the mentality of a guitarist: what would a guitarist do here, and what do I want to do here as the band's guitarist, rather than as the composer? It's a different way of doing it but I really enjoyed it."

The Tangent have been a steady unit for many years now, but as Tillison began work without his well-established bandmates, he discovered that there were a few moments of friction, albeit caused by the only man in the room.

"I often joke that during the whole process, the bassist and the drummer fell out with each other!" he chuckles. "In a way, it's true, because parts of me as a bass player were really struggling with what the drummer was doing, like, 'Fucking hell, why didn't he do that right?' [Laughs] But despite me working without Jonas, Luke and Steve [Roberts, drummer and ex-Magenta], I still feel that, in many ways, they were there. I couldn't have done this without having learned from them. Everything about the way Jonas plays the bass was the way I wanted to play it, for example. So I've learned what the other guys do in the band, and I'm sure it'll help when we get together to make the next one."

A garrulous and articulate advocate for his own band, Tillison has clearly enjoyed the creation of *To Follow Polaris*, but he does admit that spending many months holed up in the studio, with no one to act as a sounding board for his ideas, looks like a recipe for a nasty dose of stir craziness. At the very least, the experience has led him through periods of acute self-reflection.

"Oh yeah, that's definitely the case," he says with a grin. "It was a really exhilarating experience, but I also had to factor in that there was a lot of loneliness and self-doubt going on. I was thinking, 'Will anybody care? Will anyone like this? Will people think it's crap because the rest of the band aren't on it?' I'm sure there will be some people who say that, but will it please the majority of Tangent fans? That remains to be seen. I'll either be bombarded with hate mail or it'll be a thumbs-up!"

He needn't worry. *To Follow Polaris* is a dazzling, multifaceted addition to The Tangent's sturdy catalogue, and maybe even one of the most absorbing and celebratory records Tillison has made. As ever, his lyrics run the gamut from out-and-out positivity to cautious cynicism, with songs like opening epic *The North Sky* and the poignantly tech-savvy *A 'Like' In The Darkness* presenting the musician's current thoughts on just about everything, and in the most vivid and inventive of musical contexts. As Tillison notes, he's not immune from the world's woes, but neither is he prepared to succumb to a despairing view of the world around us.

"Polaris is very symbolic, the North Star," he says. "It's totally indisputable — it doesn't even matter if you're a Flat Earther, you can't deny that the North Star is true and real. The album is very much about searching for truth in a world where we're losing track of it. I'm suggesting that, despite all the lies, deceit, conniving and the general ranting and arguing that goes on all over social media and the internet, we can overcome it all by focusing on things that we all can agree are true. I'm optimistic but realistic!"

How does he manage to stay buoyant during such dark and divided times?

"We fall into a very interesting generation, because we lived the first half of our lives without the internet, and the second half with it. Very soon there will only be people who lived with it from birth and can't remember how things were before. Sometimes I have to ask myself, 'Is it better now or isn't it as good as it was?' In general, I think the answer is that it's better now. I wouldn't be talking to you now and The Tangent wouldn't have happened without the internet, so it's capable of really positive things for

**Andy Tillison leads where others follow.**

Always keeping one eye on the sunset.

people. But it does have a big downside to it. Slowly but surely, we're losing the spark of truth, and I guess that a lot of the lyrics on this album are a plea to just keep your eyes open for the true things, you know?"

Alongside his observations on human progress (or lack of it), *To Follow Polaris* is the most introspective record Tillison has made in a long time. In particular, *A 'Like' In The Darkness* dares to ask whether the act of making a prog rock record in 2024 will actually have any impact on the wider world. The conclusion seems to be a tentative, "Yes, why not?", and a plea to appreciate the value of The Tangent's music itself, no matter how far from mainstream attention it might dwell.

"That song is about the loneliness I felt making the record, when there was no input from anybody and no contact, and you're just working and working. Sometimes it's late at night, and I can see sheep out of the studio window. I can see the light from my bedroom, my studio room, going out across the field, and I think, 'What is this little light going to mean?' What will this little riff that I'm churning out right now, on this night in a dark farmhouse, somewhere on the Yorkshire Moors, mean to anybody and what will it actually do? I know there's a positive answer to that. Music is a spiritual thing that can lift people, and it doesn't matter how many people it lifts. I don't have to be Taylor Swift, I just need to be able to talk to a few people who enjoy what I have to say."

An impressive achievement by anyone's standards, *To Follow Polaris* is very much an album designed for these uncertain times. Nonetheless, Tillison's enlightened outlook shines through when it matters most, not least on 21-minute colossus, *The Anachronism*. A song that takes aim at authoritarianism and the duplicitous amorality of rogue governments and corrupt politicians, it ends on an irresistibly upbeat note that beautifully sums up the hopefulness and humanity that have driven The Tangent from the start.

"I think these are the most difficult times that I've lived through," says Tillison. "We've got a war on our doorstep. Fear is growing in many people's heads. *The Anachronism* is many minutes of criticism of autocracy, theocracies, Putin, and the whole way politics in general works, but it plays out on this gloriously optimistic end section. It's a big finale that looks towards the North Star, as we ride off into the sunset, because, in the end, what else can you do?"

*To Follow Polaris is out now via InsideOutMusic. See thetangent.org for more information.*

# Shifting Gear

In the two years since *Resident Human*, **Wheel** have undergone internal changes that very nearly destroyed them. But fortunately the Finnish-Anglo band have bounced back with the more experimental *Charismatic Leaders*. Singer and guitarist James Lascelles reveals the challenges behind creating their third studio album, how Meshuggah's "best amp" helped them, and why they just can't shake off those Tool comparisons.

**Words:** Rich Hobson **Images:** Anastasya Korol

The last time *Prog* spoke to Wheel, the future looked bright. The Anglo-Finnish band were about to release their second album, *Resident Human*, and frontman James Lascelles seemed in good spirits as he discussed mindfulness and the benefits of yoga and exercise, explaining how they helped him work through issues that had caused him to "completely burn out" in summer 2020. Only, Lascelles wasn't out of the woods yet.

"It took me quite a while to bounce back," he admits, a few years on from a period that by his own reckoning almost caused the wheels to come off completely. "*Resident Human* was a very odd place to be, for all of us. In many ways I think [recording] it was the only thing holding me together. All my paid work in Finland had stopped and I was just trying to grind away.

"Eventually I got a job in a factory," he reveals. "For a moment it looked like our career was done; 2019 had been such an amazing year for us, so it really felt like this profound sense of loss. We really weren't sure where we'd go from there, so I think there was a lot of pain and confusion that went into the album. Life and death, considering our place in the cosmos... that kind of stuff."

Three years on from the release of *Resident Human*, Wheel are in motion again. Returning to the road after the pandemic helped establish a sense of momentum they've carried forward to their bold new album, *Charismatic Leaders*. At the same time, the band have also rediscovered a sense of heft that made them rising stars in the prog metal scene in the first place. Three albums in and almost a decade since they formed, Wheel are coming into their own.

"'Formed' is a strong word," Lascelles deadpans. "Originally it was all just a demo on my computer I'd done with my old band in the UK many, many years earlier. That ended up being the material for our debut EP [*The Path*]. We've come a long way."

When James moved from the leafy English county of Hertfordshire to the cosmopolitan city of Helsinki in the early 2010s, he knew there were no certainties. What he also knew, however, was that he needed a change of scenery and that Finland had some of the finest musicians on the planet – perfect for realising his prog metal dreams.

"The most profound difference coming from the UK was just how well-trained all the Finnish musicians are," he explains. "Here, you could go to the smallest bar in the most remote town to see a band and they would be breathtakingly spectacular."

Whatever magic ingredient it was that Finnish musicians added to the mix, it worked. In 2017, *The Path* landed Wheel on the radar of fellow Helsinki resident Paavo Lötjönen of Apocalyptica. Impressed with the band's meditative melodies and grandiose song structures, Paavo then introduced Wheel to his band's management ("Their business know-how and support has been indispensable in the rise of Wheel," Lascelles admits).

Two years later, Wheel were ready with their debut album, *Moving Backwards*. Switching between propulsive alt metal choruses and idiosyncratic time signatures and polyrhythms, *Moving Backwards* was clearly indebted to Karnivool and Tool but nonetheless marked Wheel as a distinctive prog metal force in their own right.

Wheel: they're in motion again!

"*Moving Backwards* was very processed and mechanical – which is actually what we wanted, as it fit the themes of the music," Lascelles explains. "By contrast, *Resident Human* was very live and open, because we'd been touring the year before and wanted to capture a better sound. This album is a happy medium: it keeps the density of *Moving Backwards* but also has the live energy of *Resident Human*."

Speaking ahead of the release of *Charismatic Leaders*, Lascelles is in a sunnier place – both figuratively and literally. The singer and guitarist is enjoying some much-needed R&R in the Spanish city of Barcelona.

"Plus, it beats Finnish winter," he adds with a wink. "As of maybe the end of last year, I've got back to normal productivity and creativity for the first time in a long time."

That doesn't mean that *Charismatic Leaders* came without its challenges, however.

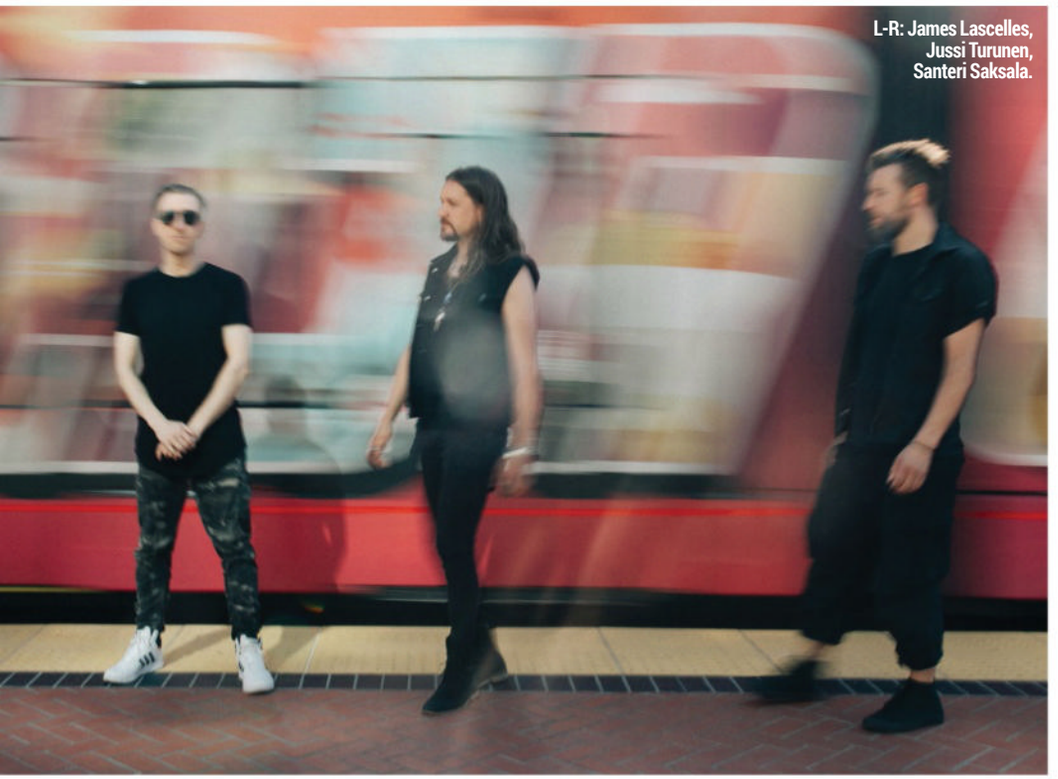
"Our bassist [Aki Virta] left during the recording process," Lascelles acknowledges. "He has a very young family and had been missing them whenever we went out on tour, so the timing just wasn't great. We also had technical problems, we didn't have lyrics finished... all these minor and not-so-minor fuck-ups during the process. But I'm really proud of how we've handled it, because it's turned out super-well."

This pride in the material is matched by the vibrancy of the album itself. Recorded with engineers/co-producers Daniel Bergstrand and Fredrik Thordendal of Meshuggah, *Charismatic Leaders* captures Wheel at their most insistent and forceful, a stark contrast to the more meditative tone of *Resident Human*. Opener *Empire* rampages out the gates atop riffs that could come from arena-sized metal acts like Alter Bridge, while *Porcelain* and *Submission* drift on ocean-deep melodies closer in style to Mastodon or Deftones.

"From the start, we were pretty sure we had a very heavy album," Lascelles says. "Especially compared to *Resident Human*, which had more of a psychedelic side. Fredrik and Daniel worked on this for 16 hours a day for about three weeks."

An avowed Meshuggah fan, Lascelles admits he was excited to work with the fellow guitarist on getting the tone right for *Charismatic Leaders*.

**"I'm too jaded these days to think music can save the world, but I do think it can change how we think and feel. It's done that enough times in my life."**



L-R: James Lascelles, Jussi Turunen, Santeri Saksala.

"Fredrik had this huge wall of amplifiers, so he was like, 'We'll get you one sorted'," he recalls. "I figured that meant we'd be testing each one, finding the sound that worked. But I turned up the next day and he'd already picked one out. He was like, 'There's no point testing them; this is my best amp.' It sounded fucking amazing and we used that for the whole album."

Wheel also took a more experimental approach with their songwriting. Guitarist Jussi Turunen earned his first songwriting credit with acoustic instrumental *Caught In The Afterglow*, while Lascelles explains that *Porcelain* came about as a result of a 20-minute-plus jam he edited down into the final seven-minute composition. Despite all this, the band still haven't been able to escape the comparison that has dogged them on each new release: Wheel clearly love Tool.

"There's a comment on [the YouTube video for lead single] *Empire*, like, *'Another* Tool copycat band' and I'm just thinking, 'If this sounds like Tool to you, I'm not sure you've been listening to Tool,'" says Lascelles.

"Some of our stuff, definitely: we've borrowed the polyrhythms, weird meters and elaborate structures, but *Empire* doesn't sound like that at all. At this point, we could release a hang-drum 20-minute odyssey with seagull noises and somebody would still say, 'It sounds just like Tool!'"

As propulsive as Wheel might sound on their new album, it's nothing compared to how fired up they are lyrically. Lascelles has never shied away from being outspoken: the song, *Movement* was written about the death of George Floyd ("The police shouldn't be able to murder somebody in broad daylight," he says), while on *Moving Backwards* Wheel took aim at totalitarianism. Even with that in mind, *Charismatic Leaders* may be Wheel's most political record to date.

"I can see why you'd say that and maybe you're right," Lascelles concedes. "At the time, I felt *Moving Backwards* was more explicitly focused on politics. But it's the most sacred duty of art, to hold up a mirror to society."

*Charismatic Leaders* certainly does that. *Empire* was inspired by a lawsuit put against Fox News after the broadcaster spread claims about voter fraud in the 2020 US elections. A $787 million (around £633 million) settlement was eventually made out of court.

**"There's a comment on [the YouTube video for lead single] *Empire*, like, *'Another* Tool copycat band' and I'm just thinking, 'If this sounds like Tool to you, I'm not sure you've been listening to Tool.'"**

"It just blew my mind that the owners of this company were able to sell that without any consequences whatsoever," Lascelles marvels. "We've got massive companies advocating for overthrowing governments, live on television.

"These companies have a huge impact on how we view each other," he continues. "Especially those we disagree with. We come away with these caricatures of the worst versions of somebody, creating an avatar of everything we hate into a tangible person we can be cross at."

Although *Charismatic Leaders* isn't a concept record, much like *The Wall* and *Operation: Mindcrime* before it, Lascelles uses lyrical concepts to explore societal ills. Case in point, *Disciple* is based on an idea of cults and their operating methods, explored through the medium of a character who has escaped the cult and one who is still part of it, each arguing their case to the other.

"They're both trying to save each other from their perceived positions," Lascelles explains. "We see it everywhere now though: popular music, politics; they're all reading from the cult playbook."

All this plays into the album's title, *Charismatic Leaders*. Lascelles admits there are obvious figures who he could be referring to, but also that the idea behind the title goes further than any one individual.

"The further I got into the lyrics, the more I realised a lot of places can be described as having 'charismatic leaders,'" he explains.

Global politics are more divisive than they've been in decades, and the frontman acknowledges there's a level of timeliness to the album's arrival.

"We're watching this gradual erosion of democratic freedoms wrapped up and smuggled in with these fear and identity politics," he explains. "We've been conditioned over recent years to believe that protesting is ineffective, which I'm certainly starting to believe as the intent of the protest is never as important as the media framing of the narrative around it."

With the album ending on the lyrics, *'Smother your inner child, swallow your empty promises/For there is no escaping this'*, it would be easy to read *Charismatic Leaders* as closing on a bleak note, but Lascelles quickly points out that not *everything* on it is as it seems.

"That particular song is actually more about facing reality," he reveals. "I was drawing quite heavily on my frustration with myself because we hadn't finished the lyrics and had so little time left. *'Smother your inner child'* is referring to the process of accepting there are limits to what you can achieve if you ever want to have an end-date."

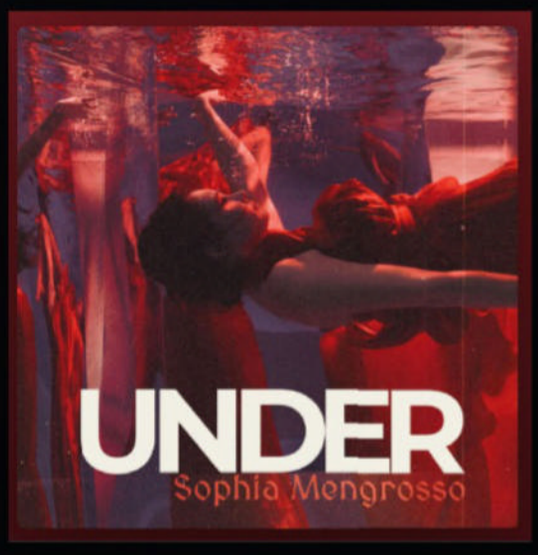
Besides, while Wheel may be taking pot-shots at everything wrong with the world on *Charismatic Leaders*, Lascelles offers a ray of optimism that he feels is threaded throughout. "At the very least, I hope people find some catharsis," he says. "I'm too jaded these days to think music can save the world, but I do think it can change how we think and feel. It's done that enough times in my life."

*Charismatic Leaders is out now via InsideOutMusic. See wheelband.net for more info.*

# SOPHIA MENGROSSO

Sophia Mengrosso's haunting, ethereal soundscapes underscore the strength and subtlety of her voice, distinguishing her as a contemporary musical force. Her fusion of classical elegance with the raw energy of rock has engendered a sound that is entirely her own. Her compelling new single 'Under' showcases her talent and versatility, with immersive production quality coupled with candid lyrics and captivating vocal delivery.

Sophia's upcoming album 'Unforgiven' will further explore the emotional depths she has so skillfully crafted. Her live shows and festival appearances are always highly anticipated, offering audiences a chance to fully engage with her unique musical narrative.

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# Far From Normal

Is Nick Beggs an alien? Is he even a prog musician? And can you train a dog with a didgeridoo? All these questions and more will be answered as *Prog* peeks under the hood of **Trifecta**'s *The New Normal,* an album that reunites Beggs with fellow virtuosos Adam Holzman and Craig Blundell. Just don't ask what his wife thinks of it.

**Words:** David West
**Images:** Diane Seifer

"I have to be honest with you, I'm not really a prog musician," confesses Nick Beggs.

That's a disarming proclamation from a musician who has played with Steven Wilson, Steve Hackett, led the prog power trio The Mute Gods, and who recently filled in for Pete Trewavas with Marillion on Cruise To The Edge.

"I'm really a pop writer," insists the bassist and Chapman Stick player. "That's how I learned, that's what I schooled myself in, that's how I started out and I've had some success doing it. But I think it runs pretty deep in me. Old habits die hard and when I start thinking about material, I start thinking about three-minute pop songs."

That leads us to *The New Normal*, the second album from Trifecta, the trio of Beggs, keyboardist Adam Holzman, and drummer Craig Blundell, veterans all from Steven Wilson's live band. Their latest release is a double album of delightfully wonky prog fusion, but the compositions are concise, filtering their flights of fancy through the discipline of pop songcraft.

"Adam is the one who will help to expand things into the more prog-fusion idiom," says Beggs. "I do like that way of working, but the kernel of the idea has to be a song format for it to work, unless it's a piece of a more surrealist idea, which is just throw stuff at the wall and see what sticks."

*The New Normal* is the follow-up to 2021's *Fragments*, which is a surprise to Beggs, who hadn't expected Kscope to want another Trifecta album.

"I thought they'd drop us," he says. "The first album did about 5,000 copies, which is average for that type of project. I thought they probably haven't made their money back, so why would they want to get more in the hole? But they really liked the project."

Where their debut album was predominantly instrumental, this time the music is interspersed with spoken interludes as Beggs talks to himself, playing fractious siblings or possibly a splintered psyche locked in argument with itself.

**Trifecta make music that's out of this world!**

"The other two are very patient with me, and they put up with my antics."

"It's the psychological thing about how we all wrestle with a twin," says Beggs. "I think we have a dual personality. I certainly do. I'm sure I'm not alone there and people have conversations with themselves about how they feel, about how they are in the world. I talk to myself all the time."

That duality exists in Beggs' life in the form of his identical twin sons, Jake and Callum.

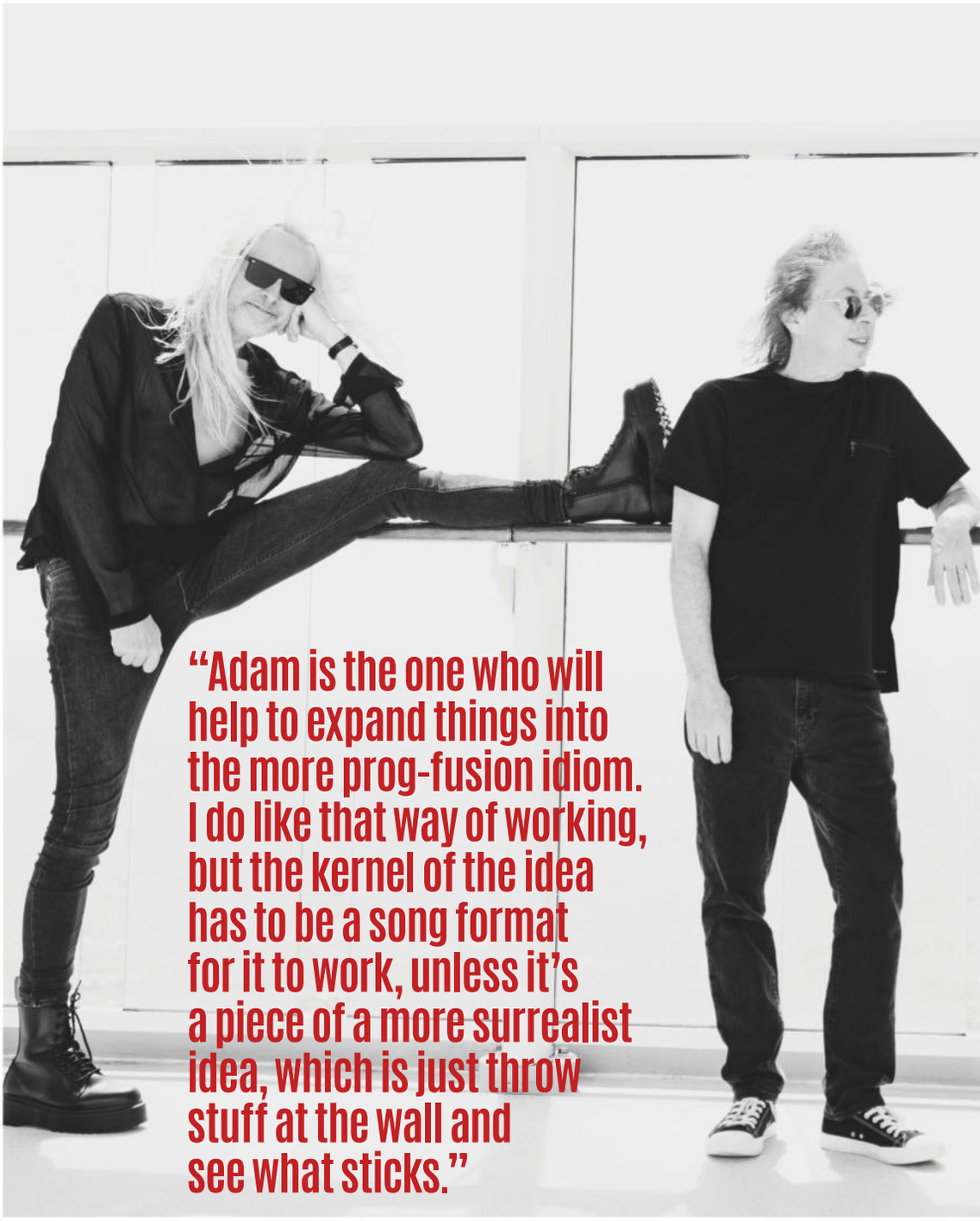
"Very often it's like talking to the same person, they are two flipsides of the same coin, so I channelled that kind of tension into the concept of that piece of music."

The track *Sibling Rivalry* sees two brothers, both voiced by Beggs, argue over who is the better didgeridoo player. When asked about this, the bassist immediately produces his own didgeridoo and provides an impromptu demonstration, explaining that it works wonders to stop his dog from barking when the postman is at the door. Apparently, his Trifecta bandmates are unfazed by such diversions from their bandleader.

"I think Adam looks at me sometimes like I'm an alien, which of course I am, but the thing is that he tolerates it. He's learned that I'm not putting it on, that's really how I live my life on a daily basis," says Beggs. "The other two are very patient with me, and they put up with my antics. Those wacky sides to the record, they came later. I think they were unsure as to whether the record label would go for it. From what I understood, it was those things that made the label think that the album was viable. I thought they were going to say, 'Let's cut out the daft stuff and we'll release it as a single album,' but they didn't. They wanted to do the expanded record."

Holzman, Beggs, and Blundell worked remotely on *The New Normal*, which seems surprising because the music relies on the nimble, seemingly instantaneous interplay between the musicians. The trio tip their hat to some of their musical idols, from Johann Sebastian Bach on *Bach Stabber* to Jeff Beck in *Beck And Call*, which features a call and response between Beggs on Chapman Stick and Holzman on Moog. *Once Around The Sun With You*, a moment of heartfelt honesty among the madness, features a guest appearance from Rush guitar legend Alex Lifeson.

"It was written with my wife in mind," says Beggs. "I played it and said, 'I wrote a song about you.' She got very emotional. There's a sincerity to it, it's a romantic song. When I played it to Alex Lifeson, he said, 'I was just celebrating my wedding anniversary and it really resonated with me.' And I said that's why I wrote it, for the same reason."



**"Adam is the one who will help to expand things into the more prog-fusion idiom. I do like that way of working, but the kernel of the idea has to be a song format for it to work, unless it's a piece of a more surrealist idea, which is just throw stuff at the wall and see what sticks."**

**We three men! L-R: Nick Beggs, Adam Holzman, Craig Blundell.**

The connection with Lifeson began when Steven Wilson's band recorded a cover of *The Twilight Zone* for the 40th anniversary edition of Rush's *2112*.

"Alex had come along to see us at Massey Hall [in Toronto], ironically because that's where they recorded *All The World's A Stage*," says Beggs. "I had my photograph taken with him, we shared a drink and a chat and then he came to another show, and he said, 'If you ever want to do any music, let me know.' I did a thing with him and Marco Minnemann and then he played on a Mute Gods track. That line of collaboration is always open. He's such a great guy and very open to working on other people's material."

Beggs' twisted humour permeates *The New Normal* and the spirit of Zappa is detectable in the mix of intimidating musicianship and absurdity.

"I like his irreverence and his disdain for the world," says Beggs. "I have the same disdain for the human race and the stupid things we say and do. I think it's ripe material to comment on."

For Beggs, it's important for songwriters to have something to say and to say it with conviction.

"Hitting people over the head with your ideas is a good thing and Zappa did that. He didn't pull any punches. He told people if he thought they were stupid. I think it's good; it's challenging. I mean I'm stupid, we're all stupid. Everything we do is by a process of trial and error and we get it wrong far more than we get it right. When we get it right, we change and that's good."

In addition to Zappa, Beggs admires Vivian Stanshall from the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band as a surreal lyricist, but in writing for *The New Normal* he was drawn to subjects with more of a scientific angle.

"There was only one song on the first album, *Pavlov's Dog Killed Schrodinger's Cat,* that had a quantum science leaning and I thought we could expand on that a little bit more," he says. "*Once Around The Sun With You* talks about '*Fuse the heavy elements that make my life return*', so there's kind of a science centre to it. I like that idea."

Beggs describes the song *Canary In A Five And Dime* as a piece that appears playful yet possesses a hard edge.

"I wrote that about Trump," he says. "It refers to his getting ready to take office again, which he clearly will. The more outrageous his behaviour, the more he warps the realities of the world in a very quantum way, the more people seem to accept him. We're faced with a strange scenario where the world is changing, and this is *The New Normal*. He turns impediments into virtues and makes people love him for it."

*The New Normal* expands outwards into all aspects of music, including the challenges of touring. Beggs says there are no plans to take Trifecta on the road, simply because it wouldn't be financially viable.

"I think it's very easy to forget that we've lived through a golden age of music," he says. "In fact, the human race has lived through a golden age. We've had a long period of time without that much conflict. We're now entering a heightened set of problems globally. From here on in, the world is going to be a different place; that's *The New Normal*. With all those great records that were made in the 60s, 70s, and in some cases the 80s, we had halcyon days of travel. We could go to Europe, we could import stuff without having to pay massive amounts of tax. It's easier for me to go to America now than it is to go across the English Channel to the continent. That's devastating to the music industry. I would get up in the morning, drive my car down to Heathrow, get on a plane, fly to Germany, do a TV show and be home in time to watch *EastEnders*. The world has changed. The reality is that we won't be able to tour the way we used to, we won't make money."

Despite that gloomy outlook, Beggs says he'd love to take the trio on tour if possible, particularly now they've got a sizable body of work. Plus, not rushing out onto the road allows fans time to digest the music first.

"It makes demands of the listener," says Beggs, noting that not everyone is overly enamoured. "My wife says it's the worst music she's ever heard in her life," he says, laughing. "I made this little film, I'm going to put it up on YouTube around the time the album comes out, it's her reviewing the album and it's very funny because she doesn't pull any punches. She really shoots from the hip. I said, 'Look, it's a double album.' She said, 'Yeah, twice as much shit music.' That's *The New Normal*, Ann Beggs: 'The worst album I ever heard in my life!'"

*The New Normal is out now via Kscope. See www.facebook.com/trifectahq for more information.*

## Led Chapstick

### A look at the role Led Zeppelin played in the sound of Trifecta's new album.

Alex Lifeson's guitar contribution isn't the only link to rock and fusion royalty on *The New Normal*. Soft Machine's Theo Travis plays sax on *Daddy Long Legs*, while *Sibling Rivalry* features Beggs playing a vintage Chapman Stick that had previously belonged to John Paul Jones (right).

"Last year I got a message from Hugh Manson, the guitar maker, who looks after all John's stuff," says Beggs. "He said, 'Watch for the postman.'" In due course, a large box was delivered (with or without didgeridoo distraction is unclear). "I opened it, there was a message from John saying, 'I was having a tidy up, wondered if you wanted this?' It was a 1978 vintage Chapman Stick. I thought, 'Well, I'm going to use that on something!'"

Once *Sibling Rivalry* was finished, Beggs sent the track to Jones. "He said, 'It's very silly but the Chapman Stick sounds great,'" perhaps damning with faint praise. **DW**

***The New Normal*: not on Mrs Beggs' wishlist.**

**"It really was a little bit of a struggle for two or three months, just to feel like we could move forward and equal or top the first album."**

In 2022, 3's Robert Berry, Saga's Ian Crichton and Saxon drummer Nigel Glockler released their debut as **Six By Six**. But have the prog supergroup been able to recapture that magic on the highly anticipated follow-up, *Beyond Shadowland*? *Prog* caught up with Berry to discuss the challenges, inspirational artwork and orchestral arrangements that lie behind their "difficult" second album.

**Words:** Rich Wilson
**Images:** Dave Lepori

# S*A*S*

Whatever you choose to call it: "difficult second album syndrome" or "sophomore slump", it remains a threatening, hovering spectre for bands that have created cracking debut records. Whether caused by a lack of suitable songs or a psychological dread of writing inferior fresh material, it has debilitated many an artist. Seemingly, Six By Six – the power trio formed by Robert Berry, Saga's Ian Crichton and Saxon drummer Nigel Glockler – were also unable to dodge that fear when constructing the follow-up to their universally lauded self-titled debut in 2022.

"It's something that's hard to explain and it is a little bit like writer's block," considers Berry, seated in his home studio. "I felt the pressure from the first album doing so well, that first of all, we didn't want to disappoint ourselves. In fact, I remember Ian sent me a couple of guitar ideas as we started the construction of our first song. I did some things on it, sent it back to him and he goes, 'Oh, this isn't as good as the first album.' I replied, 'Well, you haven't worked on it yet, of course it's not' but he still felt that it wasn't coming across. That song became a bit like a baseball. We threw it back and forth a little bit more and it finally became *Spectre*.

"That was an example of a track that we weren't originally happy with, but now it's one of our favourites. It really was a little bit of a struggle for two

Six By Six: pure magic.

[*Second Album Syndrome]

or three months, just to feel like we could move forward and equal or top the first album. One of my big rules is that it's easier to fix an idea than to get one. I just go for it and then you can work on it. This album was a lot harder than the first one. It's easy in one sense, because all three of us have a lot of ideas and those ideas flow out. But when you combine them together and make a piece of music, it has to have a magic that we're excited about. There was a little bit of a struggle to get there on this one, but it eventually clicked. I think we took the pressure off ourselves once we finished the first couple of songs."

Intriguingly, Berry recalls he had concerns as to whether the debut would prove to be a success, and admits to a certain level of astonishment that the record was so well received. Central to that concern were his experiences with musicians in previous projects, whom he'd envisioned would make perfect writing companions.

"I was surprised because I've tried a bunch of different things to make that chemistry work," he says. "Let's take GTR. Steve Howe and I had chemistry when we were writing, and it was great. But with the other guys that were involved, it just didn't click. I was the lone American, the new guy. It just didn't work and I felt that grey cloud come down. That should have been a dream band for me. With Six By Six, Ian has always been in Saga, so I was thinking, 'What's this going to be like?' But it was sort of magical. I hate to identify what makes it that way, because I'm not sure that I know. Some things work and some things don't."

Realistically, the energy from this power trio is at the core of that identity, but the material on their latest release, *Beyond Shadowland*, hasn't merely relied on the template of impeccable, nimble melodies that infiltrated its predecessor. The tracks *Sympathise* and *The Arms Of A Word* possess an unexpected raucousness that infiltrates many of the songs. Seemingly, this desire to add weightier tones was the sole ambition and overriding desire when the music was being constructed, even if that perhaps meant less space for Berry's keyboards.

"We did really well with the first album and our only plan was that we didn't want to make the same album twice in a row," he reasons. "We just wanted to make it heavier, with bigger guitars and stronger drums. I learned from a few greats, like Alan Fitzgerald who played in Night Ranger: you wouldn't really know that there were keyboards in Night Ranger in a lot of places. So like that, on this album, I learned how to fit it in. I put the keyboards in the background to fill it in and not interfere with it being a guitar album. It was really my desire to show off this great guitar player that I'm fortunate enough to play with, more than he's ever been shown off before.

**Six By Six, L-R: Ian Crichton, Nigel Glockler, Robert Berry.**

"What people maybe don't understand when they listen to the music is that on a normal song, you may have verse one and then verse two, with the guitar being the same. Not with Ian. The guitar is always different and he never repeats himself. How he does it, I do not know, because if I produced an album and changed it that way, people would say, 'You can't do that, it's awful.' But Ian has these great ideas and works on them. He's a taskmaster and hard on himself. By the time we get it done, he shines and that is all I can say. It's the same with Nigel. If we didn't have his anger on the drums, we really couldn't do what we do."

Not that the album is simply awash with solitary paced, fiery, juddering prog. Mellower moments are carefully placed to add impact to muscular riffs, and tracks such as *Only You Can Decide*, which was penned by the Saga guitarist.

"Ian sent me that guitar part and it was finger-picking kind of stuff," recalls Berry. "I didn't use it and the album was all but done. I was sitting back doing the mixes and thought, 'We really need a cracker to cleanse the palate.' I began to wonder if Ian's idea would work. So, I pulled it out, magically I started singing and it was beginning to work. I said to Ian that I was using the guitar part and he said, 'Leave me some space as I want to do a solo in there.' We threw it back and forth and it became what it became."

Continuing that desire to create more delicate moments, the band engaged with an orchestra in Budapest. That collaboration resulted in an ambitious mixing of three of the album's tracks into a medley, which appears on the vinyl edition of the release.

"That was something which was really important to me," says Berry. "I was in contact with an orchestra in Hungary and they did a great job. It starts off with a string quartet, who perform part of *Only You Decide*, and it then goes into *Spectre* and finally *Titans*. I'm so pleased with that as it's something that I really wanted to do."

Tellingly, it's also apparent that enormous care is also taken with the lyrics. For many acts, the words are merely an afterthought, added at pace towards the end of the writing session and carelessly stapled on to the end product. Throughout his career, with previous bands Hush and 3 (with Keith Emerson), Berry has always tried to focus on positivity, penning uplifting and even motivating lyrics that enhance the music.

"I do like the positives, and I don't know how I keep writing things that are positive without saying the same thing over and over," he questions with a laugh. "I've always tried to accentuate the positives about how you can improve or enjoy your life. Although on this album there are a few things, like *One Step*, that's a little negative and is basically about somebody that did you wrong. You know, every move you make, you are hurting me."

*The Arms Of A Word* also provides a thought-provoking lyric that hints at the modern peril of cancel culture, where a careless spoken word can have dire consequences. Lines such as: '*Just one small mistake and judgement comes alive in cultural suicide*' indicate Berry's intentions. But it also deals with the ever-frustrating and ubiquitous clickbait that infests many online news feeds.

"Well, yes, you're right and that's probably about half of it," confirms Berry. "The other half is the clickbait stuff that happens with TV news and on social media. There's always something there that's designed to titillate. Maybe somebody would say, 'Here's Robert Berry with our new interview and he was talking about killing somebody.' That's the headline where people think, 'Why is this singer talking about killing?' Then you read the article, and of course it's got nothing to do with killing people. So that's also what *The Arms Of A Word* is about. You really can't trust what you read today, especially with AI, and you also can't trust what people say with words. But there are places where I think we can find some truth, even if it is just intuition. It's just harder to find. That's the good thing about the likes of *Prog* magazine. You're talking about things that people love. It's what people want to hear about and what makes them happy."

Adding to the band's appeal is the artwork that harks back to the halcyon days of progressive rock. Both covers were designed by the same artist and have an identity that's akin to the association between Roger Dean and Yes, or Hugh Syme's work with Rush. The distinctive style, on this release depicting a biplane travelling through mountainous terrain, has already become associated with Six By Six.

"The covers were both done by Rob Fowler, who is a very good friend of mine," reflects Berry. "When I was in college, he used to have a band called Savannah and we would also play together in my band Hush. He majored in art at college and he's always done all of my band posters. Whatever it is, he's done it. He's just so into it and he's all over everything to do with music and what makes it go. When I asked him for an album cover for the first release, he really thought about it and came up with the strange little guys in the sidecar. As soon as we saw it, all of us loved it immediately. I think that Rob felt the same pressure on the second album as we did, because so many people just loved that first cover.

"For this album, I remember that he sent over to us this beautiful cover, which he'd given a working title of *Beyond Shadowland*. We really liked it and just thought that was also a great title for the album. There's a lot of detail on the cover, and you can even see us just walking in the background. Those words meant a lot to us because when we started out, nobody knew we were even a band: we just released the album and that was us coming out of the shadows."

But this isn't the end of Six By Six. After two albums in as many years, Berry admits work has already begun on their follow-up.

"I've also spoken to Rob about what we would like for the third album. It's something that I'm so excited about and we're already thinking about how that could work out."

**"We didn't want to make the same album twice in a row. We just wanted to make it heavier, with bigger guitars and stronger drums."**

***Beyond Shadowland* is out now.**

*Beyond Shadowland is out now via InsideOutMusic. See sixbysixband.com for more information.*

# Apollo Has Fallen

Whom Gods Destroy get in the zone on the video set for their first single, *In The Name Of War*.

In the aftermath of Sons Of Apollo, band alumni Derek Sherinian and Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal have regrouped for new sonic adventures in **Whom Gods Destroy**. Now the ice has finally melted, the new line-up are ready to take over the world with the ambitious *Insanium*. *Prog* caught up with Sherinian to find out more.

**Words:** Rich Wilson **Images:** Greg Vorobiov

Derek Sherinian is more bashful and reserved than usual. The former Dream Theater and Sons Of Apollo keyboard player has been known to be somewhat scathing of his old bandmates. Indeed, there was a sense that the much-lauded Sons Of Apollo project – which also featured then-ex-Dream Theater drummer Mike Portnoy – was motivated by a desire to overtake them in the progressive metal hierarchy. That band released two impeccably crafted albums and there were lofty expectations of a third album that could finally propel them into the genre's higher echelons. By the tail end of 2020, Portnoy's interest in the band seemingly cooled and it plummeted down his priority list. Fast forward to 2023 and the drummer's return to Dream Theater provided a public, non-verbal declaration that cemented the demise of Sons Of Apollo.

"Yeah, and you know what? Whatever," says Sherinian, his voice genuinely lacking any signs of disgruntlement. "Basically, I think that Covid was the brutal death knell for Sons Of Apollo. It simply came down to the fact that Mike had other obligations with his other bands, which was understandable. But who knew how long that was going to

**“[The rest of Whom Gods Destroy] are all [around] 30 years old, which makes Ron and I the old wise men. It’s so nice having this youthful enthusiasm and energy. So now it isn’t just a bunch of grumpy old men.”**

take? Ron [‘Bumblefoot’ Thal, guitarist] and I were sitting there and we just didn’t want to wait to see what was going to happen in the future. I’d wanted to just move forward and start something fresh. So, that’s what we did and it’s that simple. It ended up working out for everyone. Honestly, it all worked out great. I wish Mike and the guys in Dream Theater the best. I really hope that they make a great record.”

Thal and Sherinian’s partnership endured and proved to be fruitful, with the pair continuing the musical understanding that had been the core of the Sons Of Apollo sound. They were, of course, simply a duo devoid of rhythm section or vocalist, but they already had a few tracks written, including the anthemic *Find My Way Back,* which were intended for the aborted Sons Of Apollo album. With writing ongoing, the duo remained conscious that they needed to entice other musicians into their new project.

“Bumblefoot and I wrote a large majority of the music for the band before, so for us it was just business as usual,” says Sherinian. “We were sending ideas back and forth online, which we would expand and develop. I think it was 2019 when the singer Dino Jelusick came onto my radar. Eric Singer of Kiss heard Dino do a cover of one of the songs from his old

band, Badlands. He said, 'Derek, you've got to check out this singer!' I listened and knew that this guy was amazing. I started corresponding with him shortly after Covid and Ron and I sent him some of our ideas, which he would sing on top of it. I remember saying to Ron, 'Dude, this is the future right here.' So we demoed up our song ...*War* and a couple of others, and sent them to Thomas Waber at InsideOutMusic. We said, 'Thomas, this is the future, are you in?' He wanted to sign us immediately. We were ready to launch this thing in 2021 but Dino was tangled in a record contract, which took a while to get through. So our thing was on ice for almost two years. But once he was free and clear, we had the record contract waiting for us."

With a deal signed, the trio of Sherinian, Thal and Jelusick sought a drummer and bass player to add to the unnamed project. Rather than selecting the more predictable candidates, there was a desire to recruit the younger generation to add a fresh dynamism to their sound.

**"It ended up working out for everyone. Honestly, it all worked out great. I wish Mike Portnoy and the guys in Dream Theater the best. I really hope that they make a great record."**

"This new breed of musicians are just incredible at a technical level," enthuses Sherinian. "We recruited Yas Nomura on bass and he's amazing. He can double anything that Ron can play. I saw Yas on Instagram, as, for some reason, he kept popping up in my feed. I was watching him play and I immediately had the vision of him doubling Ron on some of these crazy lines. I reached out to him, and he was the first one we recruited after Dino. But the real wildcard here is Bruno Valverde on drums, who is just incredible. Bruno is in a band called Angra and has been with them for a long time. He has the technical ability of a great prog drummer like Virgil Donati or Simon Phillips, but he's a metal drummer and he hits super-hard. What he's done for this band is totally awesome. These are young players who are all [around] 30 years old, which makes Ron and I the old wise men. It's so nice having this youthful enthusiasm and energy. So, now it isn't just a bunch of grumpy old men, myself included [laughs]."

In terms of writing and recording, their debut *Insanium* was constructed remotely, which isn't surprising when you consider the geographic distance between bandmembers. While this modern method of writing may prove practical, there are those who miss the spontaneity of the more old-fashioned technique of hiring a rehearsal room and band jams. Is Sherinian conscious of that?

"Well, Ron is in New Jersey and I'm in Los Angeles, so everything is remote," he explains. "We both have studios and we're both pretty adept, so if we have ideas or are inspired, we put it out and send the session over. He will add to it or expand or vice versa and that is how the whole record has been done. Then we would add Dino into the mix and get his vocals on top of it. You say 'old fashioned', but the new Black Country Communion record is coming out this June. That was all of us in the same room, learning the songs in the control room, then going into the live room and playing it. One or two takes a recording and then move to the next song. We would never be able to do that in a band like Whom Gods Destroy. It's just too technical and there's too much shit going on. It could be done but it would take weeks of rehearsal. Unfortunately, we don't have the luxury of that because we're scattered all over the globe."

Progressive metal is a crowded genre, overpopulated by bands satisfied with merely repeating the past and adopting a template of contrived musical chaos. Whom Gods Destroy retain a uniqueness that's lacking in the competition, possessing an identifiable edge that makes them an endearing proposition. Both lyrically and musically, there's a care that's been taken when constructing the songs. That distinctive sound isn't lost on the keyboard player.

"That has to do with the fact that Ron and I have such signature styles on our instruments that you can't really put labels on us," he argues. "We're chameleons and can morph into any genre, whether that's hippie rock, instrumental, jazz passages, neoclassical, full metal or prog or whatever. It's going to sound like us. So that's an advantage that we have over a lot of these other bands. A lot of it comes down to the singers. The vocals can

On the right Trek! L-R: Bruno Valverde, Yas Nomura, Dino Jelusick (front), Derek Sheridan, Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal.

really make a good band great, and a crummy singer can make a great band not so great. Dino wrote the lion's share of the lyrics and Ron contributed on *Over Again,* but it's mostly Dino. He did a fantastic job."

Although not overtly providing any negative commentary towards his former bandmates, Sherinian's chosen band name of Whom Gods Destroy could be interpreted as a mission statement. It's taken from the title of a *Star Trek* episode, the synopsis of which deals with a former captain who seeks vengeance against his former crewmates, and plans to hunt them all down. Is there perhaps a subtle message there to Portnoy and Dream Theater?

"No, honestly there isn't," insists Sherinian, moving uncomfortably in his chair at the suggestion. "One of the most excruciating things is trying to come up with a band name. We were coming down to the wire. Ron and I were on FaceTime thinking, 'OK, everyone had done outer space, everyone has done Greek Mythology. What do we have? Let's go *Star Trek*!' We were both reading down the list and saw 'Whom Gods Destroy'. It was almost as though it popped off the screen at the same time and we both said 'That's it.' There's really no competition, man. They do what they do, we do what we do and we're both in our own lanes. We're just trying to make the best stuff possible and I think it's pretty adventurous. We're getting pretty heavy and going into new territory. The general reception that we're getting is that Whom Gods Destroy is heavier, more progressive and more melodic than the old act. We just want to have a successful band that can make great records, go out on tour and take it to the world. That's it. We wanted to make the greatest record that we possibly could with Dino and the rest of the guys. It's a fresh new vibe and we are very excited to see how the world responds to the album."

Given the extended gestation period for the first album, Sherinian and Thal have already amassed substantial material in anticipation of a second release. There's also the potential for some live appearances over the coming months.

"We have ideas and I would love to have another album out this time next year," says Sherinian enthusiastically. "It probably won't happen that soon but certainly before next summer, so we can go out and play shows.

"As for touring, that's something that you'll see off the back of the second record. There may be sporadic dates, maybe some festivals this year, but as far as hardcore touring where we are out for weeks at a time, the smart move is to let this build so that there's an actual demand. We don't go out there and get hurt on our first time out. I'm in no hurry. I have been doing this so long that I just want a smooth and easy ride. I'll take my time on everything and there's no reason to rush anything. We're just waiting for the right opportunity and it is a challenge in terms of scheduling because of our prior commitments. But it is going to happen, and when it does, it's going to be totally awesome."

*Insanium is out now via InsideOutMusic. See wgdestroy.com for more information.*

# THE PROG INTERVIEW

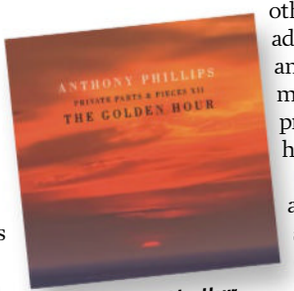
# ANTHONY PHILLIPS

Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's. **Anthony Phillips**. Best known for being a founding member of Genesis, the guitar virtuoso has gone on, in his quiet, unassuming manner, to become a prolific issuer of cross-genre albums, and one of the leading lights in production music. We caught up with him as he prepares to release the latest in this *Private Parts & Pieces* series, *The Golden Hour*.

**Words:** Daryl Easlea

Anthony Phillips can often be portrayed as a loser in the labyrinthine Genesis saga. A founder member of the storied outfit, he came from the Anon camp right back there at Charterhouse, with Mike Rutherford and Richard Macphail. Phillips was instrumental in the early sound of Genesis as they transitioned from the saccharine chart-pop wannabes of *From Genesis To Revelation* to their initial lengthy mystical prog-soul experiments. Most importantly, he played 12-string with Mike Rutherford, setting up the intricate multi-layered guitar passages that dominated their early work, making the instruments sound more like lutes or harps than the folky approach taken by most players.

As 1970 progressed, he had left – thanks to a toxic combination of illness, a broken heart and stage-fright – and was persuaded to return for the recording of *Trespass*, the group's debut album for Charisma, which was released after he'd played his final ever concert with the group that July. And, seemingly, that was it from Phillips until 1977 when he returned with his beautiful, if poorly timed album *The Geese & The Ghost*. In the interim, his old turn seemed to grow bigger and bigger, moving from clubs to theatres to arenas, withstanding personnel changes to become more and more successful. Phillips, however, juggled a career that involved study, tuition and writing for others, plus an early adoption of writing and performing library music, which would prove lucrative for him as time passed.



New album *The Golden Hour*.

Intermittent solo albums followed: some unashamedly commercial, the 1979 Rupert Hine-produced *Sides* or the 1983 pop curio *Invisible Men*; instrumental suites, such as *Slow Dance*; classical, *Seventh Heaven*, and collaborations, including *Tarka* and *Gypsy Suite* with Harry Williamson. However, Phillips is probably most loved for his *Private Parts And Pieces* series of instrumental offcuts throughout the years that first appeared at the end of the 70s, and is soon to have its 12th instalment released.

> The impact of King Crimson especially on us was huge – in terms of sonics and how it was planned out. We were rehearsing the day of their Hyde Park concert and missed it.

One thing Phillips resolutely has *not* done since 1970, however, is perform onstage. The stage-fright that crippled him is still there, and aside from playing live in radio studios and his living room, possibly the only time he stood in front of any audience since then was at the Prog Awards in London in 2016, when he collected the Storm Thorgerson Grand Design accolade for the remarkable work Esoteric Records conduct with his back catalogue.

A mine of impressions, comical voices and alter egos, the cricket-devouring Anthony Phillips is the epitome of an idiosyncratic Englishman, who just happens to be a virtuoso guitarist and pianist. He welcomes *Prog* to his south London home and talks happily, freely and wittily about his storied career.

A promo photo of Genesis for Decca Records, L-R: Anthony Phillips, Mike Rutherford, Tony Banks, Peter Gabriel, Chris Stewart.

ANTHONY PHILLIPS ARCHIVES/DECCA RECORDS PROMO PIC/PHILIP GOTLOP

PRESS/AL STUART

Stage-fright hasn't hindered Anthony Phillips' incredible career.

**All of Genesis were terribly well-to-do. What did your parents make of your early dalliances with pop music?**
Mum was very supportive; Dad was much sniffier and a bit askance about the whole thing. I think, like everybody else in the 60s, they didn't quite know what had hit them. It was pre-drugs, but rock'n'roll was already synonymous with ne'er-do-wells. Soon, my mum realised that I was taking it very seriously and not just mucking about.

**Didn't she forward you the cash for your first significant guitar?**
She did. £70, which, back in 1966, was a lot of money: it was a pre-CBS Stratocaster. I had to go all the way down to Erith [in south-east London] with my friend, Rivers Job, and bought it from one of Bern Elliott And The Klan [beat group who used to be Bern Elliott And The Fenmen]. We used our dining room for Anon rehearsals and my mum drove us to the studio for our first demo at Tony Pike Sound, where they kept telling us to turn everything down. We had this song called *Pennsylvania Flickhouse*. It was pretty dreadful, but the one merit it had was that it was a bit Stonesish.

**Anon played the now-infamous double bill gig at Charterhouse with The Garden Wall [Tony Banks and Peter Gabriel's group] in July 1966. You were on top of the bill and the plug was pulled during your set, isn't that right?**
We were allowed to do this impromptu concert. Geoffrey Ford, the housemaster, was very effete, and didn't want us to speak between songs. It was summer term, and people were demob happy. We had more people than came to most early Genesis gigs. Three or four hundred. We had an equipment breakdown and Richard, with great presence of mind, said, "Sorry folks, this is all part of the act." Gownboys House were rocking the school clock and there was mayhem. Geoffrey stopped the concert. Rivers threw a lead at him.

1969's *From Genesis To Revelation* and 1970's *Trespass*.

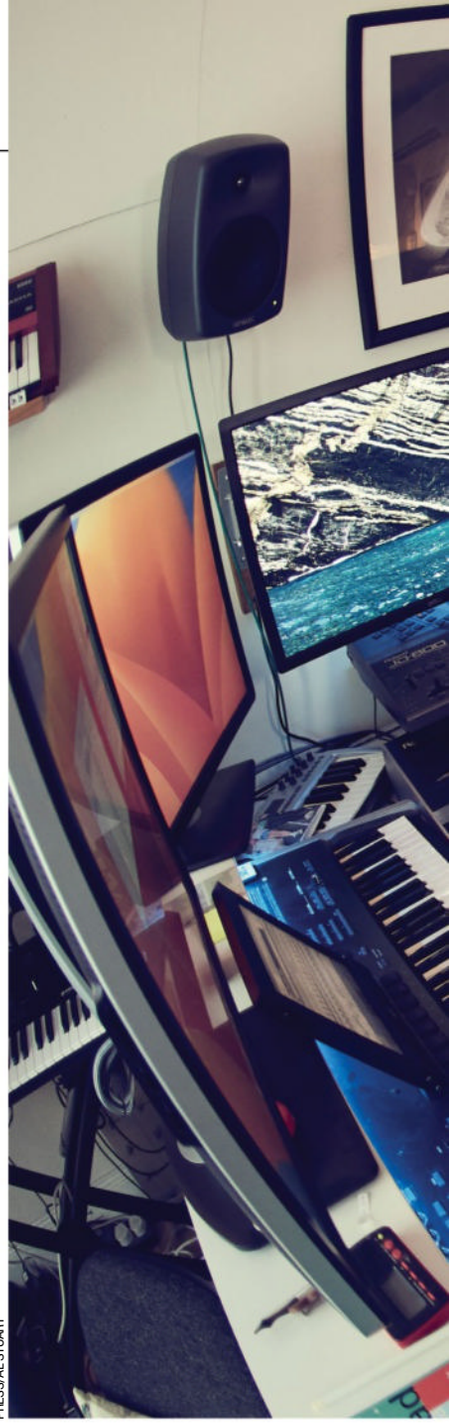
**Everything changed after that. The two groups eventually coalesced and the genesis of Genesis was in the air…**
We made a demo where I wrote all the crap songs and Pete and Tony wrote the good ones. Pete only came along at Tony's insistence; I didn't know Pete could sing, he'd just lent us his drums at the time. John Alexander gave the tape to Jonathan King, and we ended up signing to Decca!

**And that didn't particularly work out for you so change was inevitable…**
It's a good thing, really, that it wasn't successful, or we'd have never developed our distinctive style. One day, I heard this golden sound of a 12-string coming from the glade at Charterhouse. That was it, I had to get a 12-string, and I started writing in a different way. On the one hand, we were writing unoriginal blues stuff like *Going Out To Get You*, and then this experimentation that we didn't really realise, as we were just mucking around thinking it was rather lovely. It's only in retrospect, I realised we weren't really influenced by anybody else. I suppose the closest thing was the interplay between Simon Nicol and Richard Thompson in Fairport, but they were very much six-string, a little bit more folky. Whereas we were into weird chords.

**The summer of 1969 was tumultuous for you, was it not?**
I'd been dumped by Lucy Burge, the love of my life. We'd recorded *From Genesis To Revelation*, and Jonathan King had mixed the backing track to mono and added the strings. It was released in March and the whole thing sounded limp. It seemed my whole world had come to an end. Being rundown causes illness and I contracted glandular fever quite badly, but I managed to work hard and get decent A-Levels. Genesis didn't really know what to do, whether to go on.

**When you were mooching around wondering what to do next, the *East Grinstead Courier* ran a feature calling you "folk-blues-mystical", and in the picture there was also Brian Roberts and Anthony Hills Smith…**
Anthony Hills Smith doesn't get much credit. He was incredibly encouraging. We called him 'Hillie', which is *terribly* public school. Pete knew him from Chobham [a village in Surrey, around half-an-hour away from Charterhouse], and he was in a group called Design. He sailed close to the wind yet had a lot of charm, like a breath of fresh air. He would just pop down and listen, telling us not to give up and said we had something. Brian Roberts, too, particularly for constantly letting us record at his place. The encouragement of one or two of those people was worth its weight in gold.

> Tony Banks was always friendly with me. But in a competitive situation, it was the only time I'd ever seen him anything other than friendly. He's *terribly* competitive. Mike told me once they were playing tennis, and said the vibes coming from the other side of the net were so bad that he just gave the game away.


PRESS/AL STUART

**You then decamped to Christmas Cottage, in Dorking, and spent the rest of 1969 rehearsing and writing.**
Yes… we worked so hard, and it paid off, but we sort of frayed at the edges.

**To be in that cottage during the same period as *In The Court Of The Crimson King* and *Monty Python* must have been incredible?**
The impact of Crimson especially on us was huge — in terms of sonics and how it was planned out. I later worked with Mike Giles, and he told me how the music was all planned before they recorded it. They went to America too soon, and that was it. We were rehearsing the day of their Hyde Park concert and missed it.

Composition is Phillips' great joy.

**Peter Gabriel often seemed isolated during rehearsals, didn't he?**
I always felt a bit sorry for Pete as we would gang up on him. He would have this incredible perception, all the time. It was almost too much, one in three ideas would be really good, but they wouldn't stop coming. When we were ganging up against Pete, Tony was at the forefront.

**That pecking order was a famous thing in Genesis, wasn't it?**
Tony was always friendly with me. But in a competitive situation, it was the only time I'd ever seen him anything other than friendly. He's *terribly* competitive. Mike told me once they were playing tennis, and said the vibes coming from the other side of the net were so bad that he just gave the game away. They say Paul McCartney was replaced with Billy Shears [conspiracy theorists claim the real Beatle died in 1966] — I sometimes think that Peter was replaced, as well.
He used to sit there like an old woman, and then he exploded into this psychedelic thing. Because of two 12-strings trying to keep retuning that took forever onstage, Pete was forced to do something and so he started slipping into this persona, which wasn't the shy, sweet, slightly inarticulate Pete — he switched into this Messianic character looking into the far distance.
If we'd not had two 12-strings, would he ever have started telling all those stories? We'll never know. A great imponderable.

**You played with some incredible people in your short time on tour with Genesis…**
I would love to be able to tell you about meeting Nick Drake or David Bowie… we just passed backstage at best. Mott The Hoople were incredibly supportive, though. Ginger Baker wasn't very pleasant.

**Your departure was a momentous time for the group – the only time they truly came close to jacking in the towel.**
Glandular fever had been awful. I was incredibly ill. But we were young and kept driving forward. I then got bronchial pneumonia, took a couple of weeks off, came back and recorded *Trespass*, went back on the road. When it came to solos, I was turning down. I'd just lost my nerve. I was basically, fundamentally scared. I was also being advised by medical people to leave. We were dossing down on floors. Glandular fever can affect your nervous system.
I can't be sure, but I think that the two were linked.

**What happened in the seven years when nothing was officially released?**
I was a lost soul after I left the group. I had a place at Kent University to read Philosophy. I remember they sent me a Bertrand Russell book — my idea of philosophy was sitting smoking joints and discussing life. That's what I thought it was, then suddenly there's all this scientific stuff. I'm a stranger to science. I panicked and switched to History. My nervous system had taken such a caning, in

a sense, I was having a quasi-nervous breakdown. The idea of going to university seemed completely terrifying.

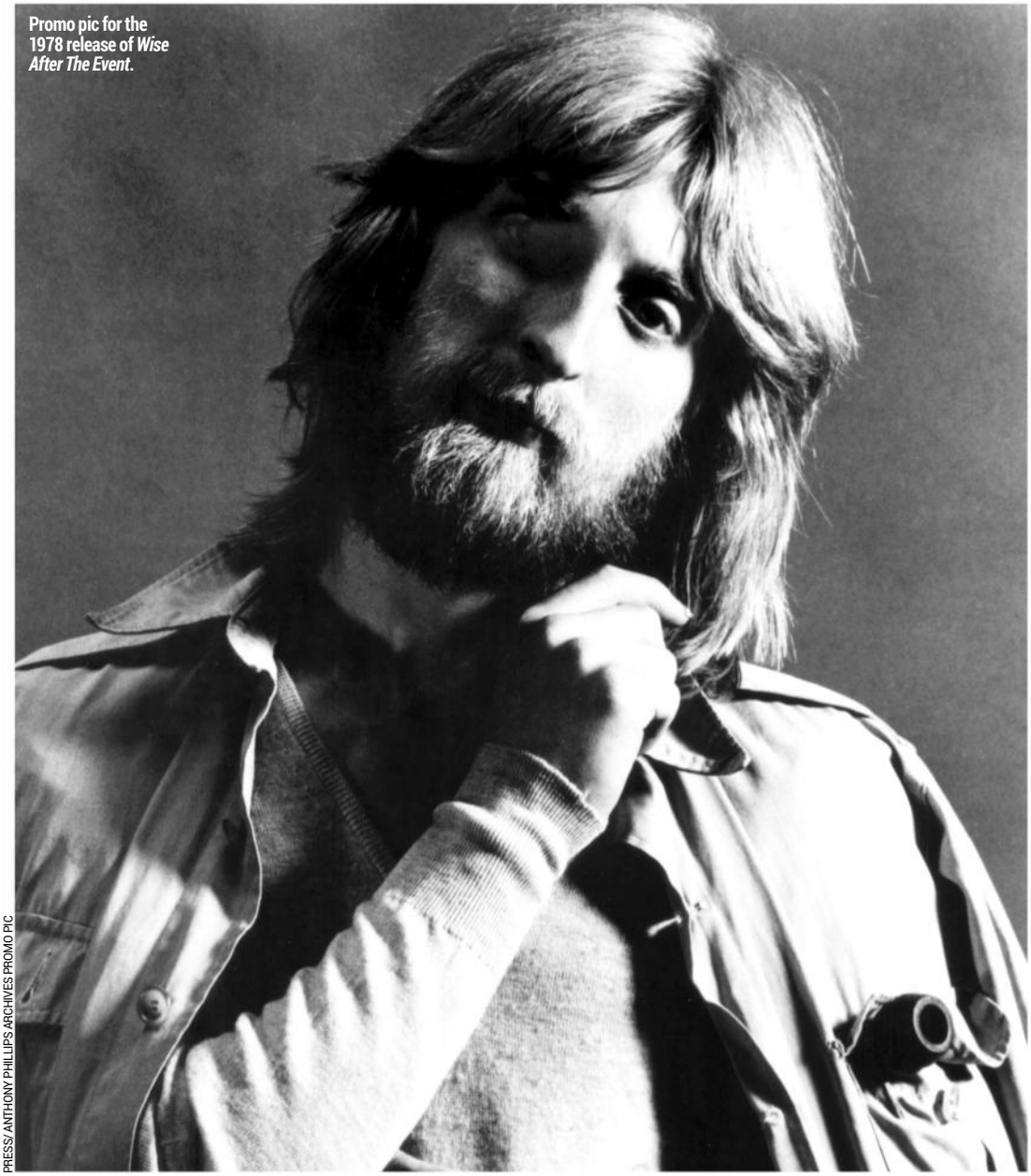
**You went back to music school?**
I deferred university for a year, and then I heard Sibelius for the first time, and that opened a new world for me. I knew that I had to read music. I had to catch up on stuff that other people would have done at the age of 13. I studied part-time at Guildhall [School Of Music And Drama in London], studying harmony, counterpoint and orchestration.

**And teaching followed?**
I started teaching classical guitar from 1972 onwards. I asked for a poster to be put up in a music shop, and they put 'Ex-Genesis' and people thought it said 'Ex-Genius'! I taught at Peper Harow [a therapeutic community for troubled adolescents in Godalming] from 1975. I was also teaching at Reed's School in Cobham. I was still teaching one day a week at Peper Harow as late as the recording of *Sides*. I was teaching the day Ray Cooper came in and did his overdubs. I've still never met him!

**Mike Rutherford started to encourage you back into writing and recording around this time.**
There was a brief period of schism, but we spent two Christmas holidays together in Cornwall and southern Ireland. We both love wild seascapes. We wrote some of the extra sections to *Henry* [from *The Geese & The Ghost*] at the hotel in Bantry Bay.

**When you started taking steps towards recording, you used Phil Collins, didn't you?**
Phil was great — he didn't drive, so I would pick him up and he would gossip about what was going on in the group. He was just the sort of personality they needed; John Mayhew was great, too, but different — he wasn't Phil. He had that plain, slightly folky style on the two songs that he recorded for me, like *More Fool Me* from *Selling England By The Pound*. He was music hall to Peter's higher opera, and the two were a perfect foil for each other.

**You also played keyboards on Peter's first solo demos in 1976.**
Yes, at Trident. That was fascinating, working with Phil and Mike as a rhythm section.



Promo pic for the 1978 release of *Wise After The Event*.

PRESS/ANTHONY PHILLIPS ARCHIVES PROMO PIC

**For many, *The Geese & The Ghost*, released in the States in 1977, is your masterwork...**
Most of the material on *The Geese & The Ghost* was taken from stuff Mike and I were doing in 1969 before we went on the road. Nobody was interested in *The Geese & The Ghost* coming out here; it was picked up by Passport in the States.

> "I would love to be able to tell you about meeting Nick Drake or David Bowie... we just passed backstage at best. Mott The Hoople were incredibly supportive, though. Ginger Baker wasn't very pleasant."

**John Anthony Smith really got behind you, didn't he?**
Tony did everything he could, but it was the wrong time. The situation in North America wasn't as extreme as here. There hadn't been this universal palace revolution and ritual stabbing in the back of yesterday's friends.

**It did seem to be 'Exhibit A' in the case against prog during the punk wars.**
Years later, I was playing cricket for a team called The Crocodiles and this fellow told me he had gone to Nottingham University in 1977. He had had a copy of *The Geese & The Ghost*, which he promptly had to get rid of, because it was seen as being very uncool. In North America,

I was respected for my new music — but over here, I was an old fart.

**At this time you appeared, rather randomly, on the Intergalactic Touring Band concept album with Ben E King, Clarence Clemons and many others.**
I was on *The Geese & The Ghost* promo tour and it was boring going around the country just repeating myself. So, I used to take a 12-string into the radio studio and play some live stuff. That never worried me because I couldn't see the audience. Different people coming in and contributing to this concept album. Mr M Loaf [singer Meat Loaf] was there. I remember I played on a nice 12-string track. I'd forgotten how stellar the line-up is.

**And then, after 1978's *Wise After The Event*, *Sides* came along, with your funkiest number, *Um & Argh*.**
I was forced to do a pop-oriented side on *Sides* — *Um & Argh* was just a piss-take at the A&R guys. I was drawing from quite a few lines, which I'd heard. John Perry was told that his album was too good to go out. I enjoyed that, and they were all phenomenal players.

1977's *The Geese & The Ghost*.

**Mike Rutherford and you stayed together for some time...**
Recording *Smallcreep's Day* was fun. It was interesting to be employed as a keyboard player. [Drummer] Simon Phillips was younger than us and he would want us to jam, which is something I really don't do. It was great being at Polar Studios, but we never met ABBA.

**And you had a brief time in Camel too?**
Andy [Latimer] and I did quite a lot of stuff together. After that, we did a lot of potential TV stuff. We had a piece used for the first European Golf Tour title theme. We did a few other things, too. I'm very, very fond of Andy.

**Was there ever any talk of maybe you joining Camel properly?**
No, there was no question, I was never going to go back onstage.

Anthony Phillips picking up an award at the 2016 Prog Awards in a rare stage appearance.

WILL IRELAND/FUTURE OWNS

I never even got close to conquering that one.

**How did the whole library music thing come together?**
I'd already been up to Riverside Studios in 1976 and recorded a putative thing for this so-called library music. I started writing for Atmosphere Music Library in 1981, while I was still very much ploughing my album furrow; *1984* had just come out. I was messing around on the Jupiter synthesiser doing Channel 4 plays and wildlife stuff. Anything that would pay the bills, having just bought my house.

**A great piece of pop trivia is that you once wrote a song for Bucks Fizz!**
Yes, *Tears On The Ballroom Floor* [from 1984's *I Hear Talk*, pop pickers!]. It was going to be coming out as a single... and then they had that horrific coach crash, and, understandably, it wasn't released. Our original version was darker, more like OMD, but they made the chorus more pop. We [Phillips and lyricist Roy Hill] gave another song to Chris Neil, who was working with Sheena Easton, that she was going to record, but then she left EMI and went to America. We wrote for a Roger Daltrey album that was shelved around that era. Our days as a hit factory were numbered.

**Speaking of pop, you were briefly a VJ on VH1!**
At the end of the 80s, my album *Slow Waves, Soft Stars* got labelled 'new age' and it was successful enough in America that I was asked to present a programme for VH1. That was one of the scariest things I've ever had to do. I flew in, realised I had a cold and took Contac 400, which fries your brain but stops you sneezing. I had to choose these videos and talk about them — a lot of Pythonesque nonsense actually. I even got clapped by the cameraman. At that time [uber-cool coffee-table new age imprint] Windham Hill wanted me to record for them, and I got the brief so completely wrong, it was never released — we found a whole lot of material recently for *The Golden Hour — Private Parts And Pieces XII*.

1990's instrumental *Slow Dance*.

**The much-loved *Slow Dance* came out on Virgin in 1990 – one piece of music divided over two sides of music. Were they trying to turn you into the next Mike Oldfield?**
That all came about because I was signed to Virgin Publishing, I was working on what became *Slow Dance*. They thought it very filmic and hired me as a TV and film writer. They saw it could be a cheap deal; this was the boom time for CD, so they were able to put my catalogue CDs out. The fallow ground of the 80s paid off and a nice advance saved me. I started to get more commission work. Then we had the takeover of Atmosphere by BMG, which pushed us right up there, I started earning some proper money. I made almost nothing for the first 25 years of my life, then was very lucky. You've got to have determination and hard work, but you do need luck as well.

**Library music seems a perfect fit.**
I love the quick turnover of ideas. For me, composition is the joy. I've been very lucky in the sense that I've been able to be constantly creative, yet not under great pressure. When people who are much more famous hear my story, they say that it sounds a lot gentler. I don't have the big bright lights, but it's a much gentler life.

**You have an enormous catalogue to the uninitiated. Where's a good place to start?**
If you're someone that likes prog, *The Geese & The Ghost*. If you're somebody that likes film music and more romantic stuff, *Slow Dance*. If you've more of a classical bent, then *Seventh Heaven*, definitely. If you only like pop music, then maybe go for *Invisible Man*. I can't really recommend a *Private Parts & Pieces* album, because they're all so different.

**Do people still approach you because of the Genesis connection?**
Now and then. Although, when I worked with Guillermo Cazenave in Spain [on 1996's *The Meadows Of Englewood*], we went to see a friend of his, who just wasn't having it that I'd been in Genesis. It's when you have to give in to a guy and you think in the end, that guy's gonna realise what a fucking idiot he is.

**Or is he? He could be thinking he's from England, they all say they've been in Genesis over there...**
Maybe you're right!

*The Golden Hour — Private Parts And Pieces XII is out on May 31 via Esoteric. For more information, see www.anthonyphillips.co.uk.*

# YES

"It's good to...". The great overlooked 90s prog album is pulled out of the dustbin of history, dusted down and revealed as the gem it truly is.

**Words:** Daryl Easlea **Illustration:** Pete Fowler

For a band as accustomed to turbulence as Yes, the 1990s seemed especially unstable. If the 70s were their crowning progressive years and the 80s an MTV-assisted commercial triumph, the 90s looked confusing and clouded — not made any easier by 1991's ill-fated *Union*, which brought together the various disparate factions of the band with less-than-stellar results.

Lost in the middle of it all was their 14th album, 1994's *Talk*, a record that's been perpetually overlooked, thanks in part to its alluringly light touch. Thirty years on, this reissue — released as four-CD box set, two-LP white vinyl edition and basic single CD editions — goes a long way to elevating it to its rightful place in the Yes canon.

In the wake of *Union*, expectations were low when Yes's former Atlantic Records boss Phil Carson approached Rabin about getting the line-up that recorded 1983's hugely successful *90125* and 1987's equally slick *Big Generator* back together for JVC's label Victory — the so-called 'Yes West' featuring Squire, Anderson, guitarist Trevor Rabin, drummer Alan White and keyboard player Tony Kaye. Rabin agreed and brought in Anderson immediately to work up some material, playing eye-to-eye with acoustic guitars and boomboxes in a hotel room.

*Talk* was of one of the first albums to be recorded directly to hard drive (at Rabin's home studio) and the band had to endure software hiccoughs, yet for an album with just seven songs and an average track length of seven and a half minutes, there's little flab. Anderson, Rabin, Squire, Kaye and White seem energised by being together again, and all five play to their strengths.

Marrying AOR with prog, *The Calling* is a superb opener, with Anderson at his most strident, Rabin power-chording away like himself and soloing like Steve Howe, and Tony Kaye nodding to Rick Wakeman. It's a stunning reassertion of the power of the group, offering a potted history of the band. Anderson's exhortation to *'give me more of the same/There's a fire burning in my heart again'*, captures it perfectly.

**Talk**

SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC

> **Goes a long way to elevating *Talk* to its rightful place in the Yes canon.**

*I Am Waiting* finds Yes in power ballad territory, while the delicate *Where Will You Be* compensates for the raging loud/quiet of *State Of Play* and *Real Love*. The multipart *Endless Dream* is the standout, however — the band turning in a 15-minute-plus song for the first time since 1977's *Awaken*. Pacy, packed with drama, it updates the group's formula equally as well as what Pink Floyd were doing the same year with *The Division Bell*.

Of the additions to this box set, one disc features three versions of *The Calling* — a radio edit, a single edit and a 'special version' — all pleasant yet largely inessential. The same goes for the instrumentals *Where Will You Be*, *Walls* and an excerpt of *Endless Dream*. But the disc is enlivened by a crazed, untitled Trevor Rabin instrumental and an incredible 10-minute demo of *Endless Dream*, with Anderson extemporising over a fixed mid-90s drum-machine pattern. It's fascinating to hear such a perfect, crystalline voice sounding rather throaty and, well, dirty.

The final two discs of the four-CD edition features a (mostly unreleased) June 1994 show from Finger Lakes Performing Arts Center in Canandaigua, New York. Augmented by keyboard player Billy Sherwood, the *Talk* line-up romps through material from throughout their career, alongside six selections from *Talk*. The most uproarious reception is given to 70s warhorses *And You And I*, *I've Seen All Good People* and *Roundabout*. Chris Squire is on fire throughout, and although Rabin lacks Steve Howe's intricacy, he makes up for it in sheer power (it hints towards the ARW shows of the 21st century). It's amusing to hear just how excited Jon Anderson was that they would be performing on *The David Letterman Show* the following evening.

Back in 1994, *Talk* was the right album at the wrong time. Although the ambient dance acts were publicly worshipping it, prog was still a four-letter word. More damagingly, Victory went bust almost as soon as *Talk* was released. Within two years, Trevor Rabin and Tony Kaye were out of the band and Steve Howe and Rick Wakeman were back — a line-up that would last just a couple of years.

Listening to *Talk* today, divorced from the politics and the prog-hate of the era, it's a fine, tuneful, brawny addition to Yes's frequently jewelled catalogue. The album came with the note "Dedicated to all Yes fans..." and, in a way, *Talk* is unique in that Yes themselves seem also to be identifying as their own fans, and simply revelling in the music that they were making. Chris Squire once said that the original idea for Yes was "always good playing and good singing". The elegant *Talk* has an plenty of both.

# BASS COMMUNION

## The Itself Of Itself FOURTH DIMENSION

**Noise and abstract beauty from the hardest-working man in prog.**

It's been 13 years since Steven Wilson last graced the world with a full Bass Communion album, and given his prolific output, it's a wonder *The Itself Of Itself* arrived so soon. In just a few years he's managed to bring out a Porcupine Tree record and two solo albums under his own name, as well as overseeing the prog-focused seven-LP box set *Intrigue*. Then there's his sideline in spatial audio remixing for the likes of King Crimson, Roxy Music, Jethro Tull and Yes. On top of

> **Wilson continues to deconstruct sound as much as he makes it.**

that, there were two Bass Communion tracks released in 2021 as part of the soundtrack of Wilson's ongoing, as-yet-unreleased film project, *And No Birds Sing*.

*The Itself Of Itself* feels almost like the antidote to all that activity. These seven tracks slow the world down to such a degree that they almost feel liminal. Predominantly for the attention of fans of drone visionaries Sunn O))) and Earth, the album also contains long, meditative passages that are redolent of the bravely expansive terrain explored by Fripp and Eno half a century ago. Wilson continues to deconstruct sound as much as he makes it, with the modus operandi to take analogue noise on a journey, starting with unwanted production by-products like flutter and hiss. Musique concrète and studio manipulation take everyday sounds into the cosmic, enticing the listener with surprising patches of hypnotic warmth or euphony, products of chance from controlled environments.

The title track features a Mellotron flute that decays and distorts as the epic soundscape disintegrates. There are shards of melody that suggest themselves hidden somewhere in among the aural gloaming, accompanied by indistinctive burbling emerging from the shadows, though it's a cacophony for the most part. There are moods elsewhere that are more ambient and welcoming, such as *Apparition 3*, a sequence of three sustained notes that oscillate wanly, quavering as they ride the waves unhurriedly. It's spartan and enigmatic, and in spite of those descriptors, it's the most musical thing here, becoming more and more mesmerising as each note shimmers in the distance in keeping with its title.

For all of Wilson's busyness, the best way to listen to *The Itself Of Itself* is in a spare hour where nothing is happening, interrogating the sound in a meditative, non-critical way. *Blackmail* may throw up beauty within the radio static that permeates it; *A Study For Tape Hiss And Other Audio Artefacts* may even offer moments of tranquillity. Perhaps most pleasing of all is opener *Unperson*, maintaining a drawn out cinematic tension that really doesn't disappoint when the climax finally kicks in.

**JEREMY ALLEN**

# ALBER JUPITER

## Puis Vient La Nuit UP IN HER ROOM

**French duo stylishly explore the outer limits.**

French duo Alber Jupiter set out their stall on 2019's remarkable, sci-fi ritual *We Are Floating In Space*, and on their second full-length effort, this esoteric two-piece have drifted even further away from earthly distractions.

Steeped in krautrock's mesmerising repetition, *Puis Vient La Nuit* continues their cosmic voyage, but with a greater emphasis on the textures and tones of the post-everything set. The resulting hybrid offers gentle echoes of Tangerine Dream, OM and cult 90s post-rockers Ganger, as Alber Jupiter surf on waves of shimmering synth, meandering through trippy, widescreen vistas on a bedrock of motorik muscularity.

Whether it's the rugged Neu! worship of *Daddy's Spaceship*, or *Pas De Bol Pour Peter*'s wistful blend of downbeat groove and lysergic detail, their elegant mastery of dynamics is dazzling. On the languid *Captain Captain*, reverb-shrouded sonic space is invaded by menacing, deep space drones and swooping guitar motifs; while the title track's cinematic shoegaze vibes are so gorgeous and inviting that a wholehearted plunge into their unknowable depths could be impossible to resist. **DL**

# AMAROK

## Hope OSKAR

**Polish proggers reach out to a wider audience.**

Poland's prog and psychedelic scenes have undergone quite a renaissance over the last 15 years. And while the likes of Riverside continue to dominate, the bands that have followed are punching hard above their weight.

Amarok's origins pre-date the turn of the century, but it's their current incarnation of founder Michał Wojtas (vocals, guitars, keyboards), Kornel Popławski (bass, violin, cello and vocals) Marta Wojtas (vocals and percussion) and Konrad Zieliński (drums and vocals) that's fulfilling their earlier promise. The hard-rocking *Hope Is* is a satisfying opener thanks to Wojtas's scuffed riffs, though it proves to be a red herring. The rest of the album settles into a more languid pace that takes time to explore the space between the players. *Insomnia* doffs a cap to the cosmic blues that's at the heart of David Gilmour's playing while Popławski and Zieliński provide solid, rhythmic backing. Elsewhere, *Perfect Run* skitters and dances to pulsing synths and insistent beats. The sparsely beautiful *Dolina* is sung in the band's native Polish and, much like the rest of the album, it raises the desire for more of the same. **JM**

# BLANKET

## Ceremonia CHURCH ROAD RECORDS

**Dynamic post-rockers channel 90s grit on live-recorded third LP.**

Over their short career, Blackpool's Blanket have shown many sides to their musical personality. They've unfurled ethereal post-rock textures, proved their heaviness and even toyed with horror film scores. Their third album does something else entirely: it captures the raw power of the band playing new songs live.

Recorded at Liverpool's Motor Museum Studios, the quartet fizz with energy and intensity across what is an homage to the 90s bands they were raised on. *Nuclear Boy Scout* rattles like Cave In and early Foo Fighters, charming with its lack of polish and driving riffwork. The title track and the floor-shaking heavy grunge of *Kaleidoscope* are similarly gritty but find some sparkle in their stacked guitars.

They've not neglected their love for quiet, cinematic turns. The first of the two-part *Sea Of Bliss* (confusingly subtitled *Reprise*) comprises tender piano lines and raw vocals, while the second part, *A Sea Of Bliss*, redresses its motifs with washy guitars, rolling snares and a resurgent spirit. It's a brilliantly executed one-two that shows just how effective their songwriting can be, no matter what avenue it ventures down. **POW**

## JOHN CARPENTER, CODY CARPENTER & DANIEL DAVIES

**Lost Themes IV: Noir** SACRED BONES

**Film legend drapes dreamed-up scenes with a touch of evil.**

Nine years after John Carpenter's first *Lost Themes* album gave the great director another lease of life as a musician, the fourth in the series arrives. Working with his son and godson, he goes more route one here, with heavy guitar riffs often pushing ahead of rhythmic synths. That seems counter-intuitive – the album's theme of music for imaginary noir films (or invented scenes spinning off from actual noir landmarks) calls for something more suggestive and brooding. Yet the ploy hits as intended.

Tracks can easily be linked to their muse. *Beyond The Gallows* references 1947 black and white classic *Out Of The Past*, while the sinister finale *Shadows Have A Thousand Eyes* takes a thrilling tangent on 1948's *Night Has A Thousand Eyes*. Perhaps it's that wilful determination not to deliver the obvious which means the robust throbs and pulses eschew nuanced suspense, and hone in on the aggression and threat of violence which underscore many noir classics. Plus, it's John Carpenter – of course it's scary. **CR**

## DAWN CHORUS AND THE INFALLIBLE SEA

**Reveries** CARGO

**Ambient, dreamy, intergalactic; Radox bath, optional.**

The aptly-named *Reveries* finds this American instrumental trio building on their 2020 release *Liberamente* with another collection of atmospheric, minimalist mood pieces that flow with a vastness that repositions the mind somewhere off the shoulder of Orion. There's the occasional shaft of melody, but the focus is on airy washes of sound, with synths and strings, merging together to form a whole, with no element distinct or discernible, no recognisable vocals and certainly no soloing.

*Deus* is the epitome of this wave of sound approach, a sonic cathedral with golden light pouring through the stained glass windows. The surging *Somnium* hazily repeats a mysterious musical phrase, as if it's arriving from some distant spiral galaxy. The closing *Aufero* disappears into what sounds like heavy rain, mixed with static and analogue tape hiss, plus an intriguing, distant clanging.

Trance-inducing stuff, and one calling out for a Professor Brian Cox voice-over about the enormous scale of the universe. Everyone's favourite physicist never actually pipes up. He was probably too blissed-out after listening to this immersive album. **PGI**

## THE CHURCH

**Eros Zeta And The Perfumed Guitars** EASY ACTION

**Australian psychedelic mainstays report back from the future.**

In the late 80s, paisley-clad quartet The Church seemed destined for mainstream success with the epic, poetic guitar rock of *Starfish*. But they dipped under the radar and continued following their own idiosyncratic path.

These days they're exceptionally prolific. This is The Church's 27th album, and their second double concept set in six months. It's set in 2054 – a century on from the year of bassist, vocalist and sole remaining founder member Steve Kilbey's birth – and follows on from last year's *The Hypnogogue* chronicling the kaleidoscopic adventures of Eros Zeta, who is drolly said to *'sing like Steve Kilbey'* on *Music From The Machine Age*.

There's a lot to digest lyrically, but the music is melodically fresh and full of invention. The Church deliver a typically immersive, intricate soundworld of twin guitars and keyboards, and the songs range from acoustic-led pastoralia majestic mid-pacers and the musicians stretch out on the lengthy, structurally complex *A Strange Past* and the story ends cryptically – for now – with the fittingly haunting instrumental, *Music From The Ghost Hotel*. **MB**

## EIVØR

**Enn** SEASON OF MIST

**Faroese songwriter turns up the epic on 11th album.**

This celebrated figure on the Faroe Islands' music scene has released 10 albums independently before this one, the consistent quality of which was recognised when she was awarded the Nordic Council Music Prize in 2021. Over that time Eivør has bridged gaps between electronica, folk and classical music, while also, as on 2020's *Segl*, singing more in English than Faroese.

> **Songs barely need recognisable words to grip the heart strings.**

On her debut for metal-oriented label Season Of Mist, though, Eivør relies on singing in Faroese, and leans into a style that, while occasionally getting heavy on us, faintly echoes the windswept, widescreen symphonic metal vibe of some of her Nordic contemporaries. It's a richly atmospheric affair from the start. There's a meditative quality to the opener *Ein Klota* ('A Planet') as it wistfully evokes *'a planet unanchored/Drifting without me'*. That quotation comes from an English translation of the lyrics Eivør co-wrote with Faroese poet Marjun Syderbø Kjelnæs and has been made available online, which adds an extra resonance to these songs, but they barely need recognisable word shapes to grip the heart strings. *Hugsi Bert Um Teg* ('Still Just You')'s tale of love-lorn insomnia sounds like it means, with the lyrics translating as such arresting yet still rhyming couplets as *'A homeless yearning seeps under my bolted door/Fills the silence, back for more.'*

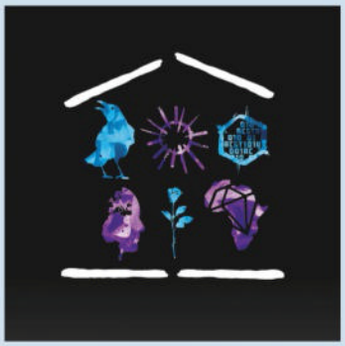
Eivør's versatile vocals are another key asset, veering from Liz Fraser-style contralto to falsetto keening and soprano pomp. The emotional impact is enhanced by elegantly arranged orchestral accompaniment, but there are traditional pop tricks at work too, as simple piano figures framed within descending chord progressions recur on *Purpurhjarta* ('Purple Heart'). They're gradually joined by a growing symphonic swell as Eivør's voice eventually reaches for Kate Bush-level higher registers as a similar tale of romantic longing unfolds.

Her previous penchant for varying aesthetic textures is still in evidence elsewhere. Title track *Enn* ('Still') unfolds on the back of brooding techno locomotion as Eivør gazes anxiously into the abyss. She delves deep into a darker musical well, summoning the doom metal gods on *Upp Ur Oskuni* ('Rise From The Ashes'), where, in a whisper-growling voice, she addresses us menacingly as if her eyes have just flashed green and her emotional longing has led to full possession by otherworldly forces. That's an outlier within *Enn* as a whole, as reflected in the songs either side of it: the Bel Canto-esque *Livsandin* and the sweetly hymnal *Gaia*. That's where the overarching melancholic, imploring feel of the album returns to close a captivating album experience.
**JOHNNY SHARP**

# MARILLION

## An Hour Before It's Dark: Live In Port Zelande EARMUSIC

**Pandemic-era masterpiece brought vividly to life.**



Marillion have come a long way since 1984's live *Real To Reel* album provided them with a life raft to cling to after the disappointing commercial performance of its studio predecessor, *Fugazi*. Forty years on, the format has become one of the foundations on which their cottage industry-turned-mini-empire is built. At the last count, there have been 17 official live albums from the Steve Hogarth-

> **The jollity can't undercut the impact of the music.**

fronted line-up, plus more than 40 released via their own Racket label. A valuable income stream, for sure, but something that's become so deeply knitted into their ongoing mythology that it would feel weird if they didn't exist.

*An Hour Before It's Dark: Live In Port Zelande* brings the tally close to 60. Released on CD as well as DVD and Blu-ray, the hook is self-explanatory. In March 2023, the band held their traditional Marillion Weekender at Center Parcs, Port Zelande on the coast of Holland. The second of its three nights was dedicated to *An Hour Before It's Dark*, still one of the most powerful and moving documents of the Covid era.

Those emotions are cued up from the start via an audio snippet of Carl Sagan's 1994 book *Pale Blue Dot*, in which the late scientist benignly but firmly puts humanity in its ultimately insignificant place in the universe. "Saturday Night is album night," says a gleeful Hogarth, as bassist Pete Trewavas plays a few bars of *Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting*, but the jollity can't undercut the impact of the music. *Be Hard On Yourself*, *Murder Machines* and especially the hymnal *Care*, with its salute to the NHS heroes who helped the nation through lethal times, are magnificent, flashing back to a time when the pandemic was still very real. Yet for all the darkness that inspired the original album, it flickered with the flame of hope. Here, with the pandemic disappearing in the rear view mirror of history, that flame feels like a communal conflagration. For a night, anyway.

The *AHBID* songs are bolstered by five from further back in their catalogue: the ever-stirring *Estonia*, *Afraid Of Sunlight* with its hollered *'King of the world!'* line, a version of *Go!*, which easily trumps its studio version, *Seasons End*'s billowing *The Space...* and the now-familiar *Zeperated Out*, which features a snippet of Led Zeppelin's *Kashmir* spliced into Marillion's own *Separated Out* (the DVD/Blu-ray version features half of the *Brave*-heavy set from the following night). It's not the first time any of these songs have appeared on a Marillion live album, but it's unlikely anyone will complain. Fifty-something releases, in it's a little late for that.

**DAVE EVERLEY**

# THE DECEMBERISTS

## As It Ever Was, So It Will Be Again YABB RECORDS/THIRTY TIGERS

**The spirit of exploration is strong on the US band's first double album.**

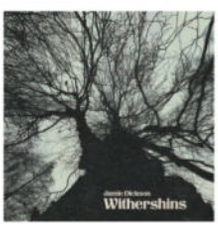
The Decemberists sit in the centre of a Venn diagram that captures progressive rock, folk and indie. In doing so, they've translated their unique oeuvre into a commercial success that binds and unites listeners from disparate strands.

Following the stylistic detour of 2018's *I'll Be Your Girl* , which saw the band introduce synthesisers and other contemporary sounds under the aegis of producer John Congleton, their ninth album finds them reunited with long-time associate Tucker Martine. The result is a record that's earthier in its delivery while satisfying their contrasting constituencies. The flutes that dance across *The Reapers* confirm The Decemberists' return to a sound rooted in storytelling while the melancholy of *The Black Maria* holds the attention without manipulating the emotions. Best of all is the 19-minute prog epic *Joan In The Garden* that chronicles Joan of Arc's divine revelation over some of the most ambitious music the band has ever recorded. Here the instrumentation drives the narrative to create a compelling experience that fulfils the band's ambitious vision. It's an album that lives up to its title. **JM**

# JAMIE DICKSON

## Withershins 6678162 RECORDS

**Summery fingerstyle flings in the classic vein of Jansch, Martyn, et al.**




A 'withershin' is a variation on a German word, widersinnig, meaning 'against sense'. In folklore and some religions it's the practice of doing something anti-clockwise, or opposite to the norm.

Superstitious and a tad wyrd: that's our launchpad for Jamie Dickson's deft fingerstyle folk-guitar set. It's no surprise that he's based in Glastonbury, where rural gentility meets cosmic power. Armed with one of the best acoustic tools for the job – a Musser Dreadnought, beautifully alive and crisp in its sound – *Withershins* takes the hypnotic, intricate style of Bert Jansch and Johns Martyn and Renbourn and adds lively turns by fiddle player Aaron Catlow and earthy upright bass from Nick Pini.

All instrumental, touches of Anthony Phillips, Robbie Basho and Jim Ghedi are in the nine-song run, and Gordon Giltrap in the filigreed *Swallowtail*, as we follow a day in nature's life from the awakening *Mother Sun* to the sedate curtain closer, *Gone With The Dawn*. A little flute and the voice of a small child feature on the Americana-esque *Lullaby*, complete with *Detectorists*-style countryside sounds. It's charming, evocative stuff, never full-on psych or LSD-heavy. **JK**

# DVNE

## Voidkind METAL BLADE

**Dune-fixated Scots continue their sand-blasted prog metal odyssey.**

Edinburgh's Dvne draw obvious – and timely – inspiration from Frank Herbert's *Dune*, and the follow-up to 2021's *Etemen Ænka* doesn't deviate from this path. Huge, evolving prog metal soundscapes meander throughout the record, though the long, drawn-out buildups of *Etemen Ænka* are lessened in favour of shorter tracks such as *Summa Blasphemia* or *Reaching For Telos* that reach their exciting apex much sooner. Dvne still take a progressive approach, interweaving and layering their many components to an almost indistinct blend, but *Voidkind*'s more direct route to its summit feels mature and intelligent.

They haven't entirely done away with their mammoth offerings. Album closer *Cobalt Sun Necropolis* nears 10 minutes, and slowly crescendos from near silence punctuated only by a high-pitched siren, into a cacophony of crashing drum fills, thundering bass, and almost chanted vocal sections. *Voidkind* is much more than an album; when consumed with the sci-fi and fantasy influences that the band shares a mutual love of, it becomes a sensory experience that lingers long beyond its final notes. **CF**

## EVERGREY

### Theories Of Emptiness NAPALM

**Captivating, if formulaic, songs from the prog metal icons.**

There aren't many Swedish progressive/power metal acts more celebrated or distinctive than Evergrey. On their 14th album, vocalist Tom S Englund remains the group's greatest asset due to his virtually unmatched knack for juxtaposing mesmerising power with emotional vulnerability. His bandmates continue to craft wonderfully dynamic arrangements around him, too. *To Become Someone Else*, for instance, mixes hostile riffs and rhythms with heavenly atmospheres, whereas the programmed percussion, majestic strings and dejected chants of *Ghost Of My Hero* make it especially sophisticated and meaningful. The touching simplicity and inspiring narration of coda *A Theory Of Emptiness*, on which they evoke Anathema's breathtaking *We're Here Because We're Here*, shines as well.

The album isn't without flaws, however, including a general sense of familiarity alongside some relatively negligible songs (*We Are The North*, *One Heart*, *The Night Within*). However, none of that keeps *Theories Of Emptiness* from exuding Evergrey's typical excellence as a whole. **JMB**

## EYE

### Dark Light NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

**Sparkling solo debut from the queen of trippy doom.**

Best known as vocalist and keyboard maestro with Welsh psych-doom merchants Mammoth Weed Wizard Bastard (aka MWWB), Jessica Ball is one of progressive heavy music's most curious and distinctive figures.

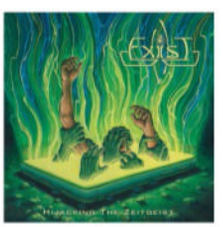
With solo venture Eye, she embraces the opportunity to explore her trippy musicality without a barrage of deafening riffs, and the results are bewitching. *Dark Light* is an often melancholy and moving piece of work, as the singer's lissom, ethereal voice drifts across a variety of compelling backdrops. There is a debt to the spectral alt rock of Mazzy Star on the title track, but Ball's devotion to the psychedelic imbues it with a ghostly vastness that belies its minimalist arrangement.

On *The Other Sees*, Eye swap pot-addled dreaminess for something spikier, as the tensions between the real and the imagined are exposed via pulsing synths, ragged guitar and Ball's sweetly unnerving vocals. It reaches an apex on *See Yourself*: a sustained whisper of a song, hijacked by an eruption of distortion. Just as her other band have carved their own niche in the doom scene, Ball has broken ground on a blissful, psych furrow of her own. **DL**

## EXIST

### Hijacking The Zeitgeist PROSTHETIC

**Cynic guitarist trims the fat on short but sweet prog metal powerhouse.**



The brainchild of Cynic guitarist Max Phelps, US prog metallers Exist have likened their fourth album to Rush's *Moving Pictures* as they seek to write more balanced music abandoning their knottier past. *Blue Light Infinite* makes that clear, packing sharp metal heft, two cosmic choruses and a dreamy rock detour into its fluid opening two minutes.

For those who find growled vocals off-putting, the pace of the record and the colourful complexity that slithers beneath their gargles keeps things palatable. In the case of *Thief Of Joy*, sweet guitar harmonies mimic Phelps's gargled utterances, underscoring the band's desire to not fall too deep into the extreme metal abyss. Phelps's clean vocals are wonderfully breezy and weave around *Funeral Toll*'s muted ambience while hints of the jazzy and the jagged turns of his day job peek through its haze.

Clocking in at 35 minutes, quality has superseded quantity here. The songs are grounded with follow-able structures and sharpened hooks but are no less colourful and gilt-edged as their previous records, but are packaged to win over an even larger raft of fans. **POW**

## MARJANA SEMKINA

### Sirin MARJANASEMKINA.COM

**In which one of the good Russians brings light to the dark.**

When Iamthemorning's Russian-born, UK-based singer Marjana Semkina launched a crowdfunding campaign to manufacture physical copies of her second solo album, she spoke of excitement, terror and existential dread. The nervousness was understandable, having spent years working on a product without knowing if people would pay over the odds to receive it: £50 for a vinyl album is a *lot*, even if it does come "laced with gold leaf".

> **Her voice is a soothing balm applied to painful subject matter.**

She needn't have worried. The project trended on Kickstarter, was 90-per-cent funded within 12 hours, and reached her target within 24.

*Sirin* rewards that faith. It's a beautiful album. *We Are The Ocean* opens with a jauntiness that belies its subject matter, Russia's ongoing attacks on Ukraine. Rather than strike a note of despair, it's upbeat and spirited, reflecting the way her friends have united to protest the invasion, sometimes at great personal risk (Iamthemorning bandmate Gleb Kolyadin was arrested in Thailand after playing a show with Belarusian band Bi-2, and faced deportation to Russia as a political dissident). Throw in a deliriously slippery, Steve Vai-esque guitar solo from Vlad Avy, and the result is a song that's very much at odds with the sum of its parts.

So far, so Marjana. The prettiness of her voice has always been a soothing balm applied to painful subject matter (death, arson, pain, suffering, poison, more death, etc.), and *Sirin* is no different. Take *Gone*. With mournful cello parts entwining at the off and sorrowful piano accompanying the refrain, *'They're gone, gone, gone, gone, gone, gone,'* it ought to be heart-shattering, but instead, it feels full of hope. Whether this is intended or not is probably moot, especially when it works this well.

Marjana's not alone on this. On *Death And The Maiden* (more death!) she's joined by Mick Moss from progressive gothic rockers Antimatter, the gruffness of his voice a counterbalance to her sweetness, and there's a real warmth to the passages they sing together. Even better is *Anything But Sleep*, a duet with Caligula's Horse vocalist Jim Grey. It's a lovely balance of ambience and atmosphere, a song that drifts into being, the two voices snaking like fingers of mist.

So much of the album is like this, with instrumental passages that slowly unfurl rather than announce themselves at the door, like *Pygmalion*, which reaches its brief climax via a series of stop-start manoeuvres that might be confusing if they weren't so exquisitely choreographed, and the closing *This Silence This Dreaming*, which pits Marjana's voice against deft and dainty backing. Absolutely gorgeous.

**FRASER LEWRY**

# ★CLASSIC★ ROCK

## HIGH VOLTAGE ⚡ ROCK'N'ROLL

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## FEATHERS AND GREED

**Pari Shōkōgun** FEATHERS & GREED RECORDS

**German sextet dazzle with psych, jazz and metal-influenced prog.**

Founded in Hanover in 2017 by Marek Feddern and Luca Gierth, Feathers And Greed move beyond their singer-songwriter roots on second album *Pari Shōkōgun*. Named after the Japanese term for Paris Syndrome – a dizzying form of culture shock – it's a mind-blowingly diverse record. *Hidden Interest* alone conjures thoughts of Jimi Hendrix, Argent and Genesis circa *...And Then There Were Three...*, while closer *Hometown* morphs from folk to metal.

Percussionist René Kretschmer and cellist Jacob Jordan bring a sense of foreboding to *Nine*, and with four able vocalists (bassist Jasper Röthmeyer and drummer Lukas Hagemann also sing), the arrangements often impress. Pursuing a loose lyrical theme of "life expectations not being met", these songs reflect the frustrations of time lost to lockdown and a general sense of world-in-crisis malaise, hence *Grey Harvest* is a poised, dark folk segue with finger-cymbal and weightless guitar arpeggios. Fitting, too, that *Pari Shōkōgun* was recorded at the Institut Für Wohlklangforschung ('melodious research'); for all their eclectic invention, these songs are wonderfully accessible. **JMN**

## THE FINAL COIL

**The World We Inherited** SLIPTRICK RECORDS

**Leicester outfit bring their gloomy post-metal album trilogy to a belated close.**

Blending post-rock's atmospherics with the gloomy din of gothic and doom metal, The Final Coil have carved out a solid reputation. Yet the conclusion to the band's *Persistence* album trilogy fails to excite the senses.

The trilogy, which looks at humanity's past, present and future relationship with our planet, kicked off with grungy *Persistence Of Memory* (2017) and the gloomier *The World We Left Behind* (2019) before the band spent two albums revisiting back catalogue cuts. Seven years after it started, the trilogy has now reached its conclusion. *Wires* may drum up early intrigue, marrying grinding mid-tempo guitars and whirring, meditative breaks, but other tracks are less multi-dimensional. *The Growing Shadows* and *Purify* are more concerned with textures than they are meaty motifs, making them effective counterpoints to the chug-heavy attack of *Chemtrails* and the thick, industrial clangour of *Humanity*, but lack staying power.

It's a record of introspection rather than aggression, as the floating refrains of *The End Of History* and *Stay With Me*'s sultry electro-gothic vibes attest, but ultimately their grandstand finish is a little underwhelming. **POW**

## THE DAVE FOSTER BAND

**Maybe They'll Come Back For Us** ENGLISH ELECTRIC RECORDINGS

**A bigger and brighter sound from Anglo-Dutch duo.**

One year on from their second album, *Glimmer*, guitarist Dave Foster and singer Dinet Poortman level up their game with *Maybe They'll Come Back For Us*. Their third album together boasts greater depth in sound and scope, with Stephen Boyce Buckley's string arrangements contributing to the sense of the band painting on a larger canvas this time.

Musically, the approach is one of tasteful restraint and carefully crafted dynamics, with the lush prog pop of *Queen Of Maybe* recalling Tears For Fears circa *Sowing The Seeds Of Love*. Poortman isn't a vocalist prone to showboating, but her strengths as a song stylist are evident in her ability to draw out the emotions in the music, ably demonstrated in *The Optimist* and the power ballad *Delicate Things*.

Level 42's Mark King lends his nimble fingers and thumb to *Talent To Failure*, laying down a bubbling bassline under the hooky melody. Marillion's Steve Rothery stops by for a guest guitar spot on dramatic album standout *These Tendencies*. But ultimately, it's the polished songcraft that makes *Maybe They'll Come Back For Us* a memorable listen. **DW**

## ART ROCK

**Chris Roberts** samples the new releases on the prog/rock boundary.

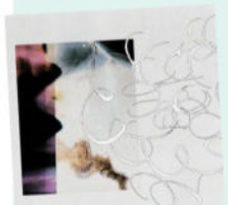
It's been 35 years since German post-punk pioneers Xmal Deutschland's last album, but *Codes* (Sacred Bones), the comeback of singer/frontwoman **Anja Huwe**, is fresh and thrilling. Proudly dramatic, and often using bilingual spoken-word techniques, it couples the cinematic electronica of collaborator Mona Mur (which sometimes echoes compatriots Propaganda) with propulsive rock which, with fellow Xmal graduate Manuela Rickers on guitar, will gratify fans of that band. Huwe has worked as a visual artist for some time, and *Codes*, which demands full attention from start to finish, is a big bold personal statement about survival, colouring its canvas with passion and class.

Michigan maverick **John Grant**'s solo albums, not to mention team-ups such as Creep Show, have been so consistently excellent that there's a danger he might now be taken for granted. As his sixth, *The Art Of The Lie* (Bella Union), produced by Ivor Guest (Grace Jones) glides through its perfectly pitched balance of cheek and charisma, wry introspection and right-wing-riling observation, it becomes clear he hasn't plateaued: he's getting even better. Songs like *All That School For Nothing* match smarts and syncopation.

Equally acclaimed shapeshifter **St Vincent** returns with *All Born Screaming* (Virgin), but forsakes the soul of 2021's *Daddy Home* to headbang single-mindedly with guests like Dave Grohl and Cate Le Bon. It's direct and forceful, but hamstrings her versatility. Except for the final track, which, in a roundabout way, gets busy honouring 70s prog.

The debut from Leeds "art indie" quartet **English Teacher**, *This Could Be Texas* (Island) is a whirlwind of invention, rarely settling in one genre when it can leap within a song from pop to math rock, from punk to prog. Meanwhile singer Lily Fontaine addresses lazy stereotyping with wonderful wordplay and a taste for surrealism. Their potential is enormous, but this, as deep as it is diverse, already feels like one of 2024's emblematic albums.

*The Dream Of Delphi* (Mercury KX) is the sixth album from **Bat For Lashes**, the musical persona of Natasha Khan, whose baroque, Kate Bush-inspired dream-pop picked up pace again with 2019's *Lost Girls*. This, though, wafts rather too tamely, as she reflects on the birth of her daughter, Delphi, and the idea of motherhood in general. The listener struggles to find a hook, a snare, within her bliss.



With whiffs of the mix of nostalgia and futurism mastered by Air, although considerably more lo-fi, French-Canadian duo **Bibi Club** intrigue gently on second album *Feu De Garde* (Secret City). They nod to Broadcast, but also to Galaxie 500 on the beguiling *Nico*, where guitars cry behind the door.

# THE TANGENT

**To Follow Polaris** INSIDEOUTMUSIC

**Andy Tillison goes it alone as a one-man band in a digital age.**

Andy Tillison has utilised a shifting array of top prog talent as a de facto backing band over the last two decades as The Tangent. However, the practicalities of recording some of the most in-demand musicians in the prog sphere (Jonas Reingold, Luke Machin and Steve Roberts) has meant that the 13th album under The Tangent banner has moved away from what was dangerously beginning to look like a settled line-up.

> **It began as an experiment, and he's succeeded beyond expectation.**

*To Follow Polaris* is truly a solo endeavour. Everything about it, from concept to artwork, from lyrics to production, from every note played to final mix, is solely Tillison's work. And every note is played by him in real time — no special guests, no programming and, as he's absolutely emphatic about, no AI!

The main album is bookended by two compositions that resonate similarly, musically at least, and allow Tillison to explore a bit of jaunty prog pop and an element of hopefulness and light — both opener *The North Sky* and last track *The Single* are built on upbeat foundations that bring to mind the directness of tracks like *A Spark In The Aether* from previous Tangent releases. *The North Sky* is a high-energy celebration, which sees an extended instrumental intro, some lovely, simple yet effective backing vocals and some keyboard and guitar explorations during the lengthy, more gentle and spacious middle section as it builds back to the main hook.

The shrewdly titled *A 'Like' In The Darkness* takes things in a slightly darker, more introspective direction, albeit with a frenetic couple of minutes towards the end, featuring Tillison's use of a digital wind controller to mimic woodwind. Sultry jazz-tinged *The Fine Line* continues the reflective slant and seems to hark back to some of Tillison's earlier work on the first couple of Tangent albums.

The usual Tangent multipart epic requirement is fulfilled by the 20-minute *The Anachronism*. Opening with an understated synth underpinning some recorded spoken word, it explodes into possibly the nearest Tillison has ever got to prog metal interspersed with cool 70s funk strains. The track continues in this vein — sections veering from quiet and knowing through to punky aggression via big musical statements that bring to mind Tillison's admitted influences, including a tremendously punchy bass riff that could easily be a *Drama*-era Chris Squire outtake.

Tillison embarked on this journey as an experiment simply to see if it would be possible — not only has he succeeded beyond expectation but he's added an important chapter to The Tangent story. It's an astounding triumph.

**GARY MACKENZIE**

# HIPPOTRAKTOR

**Stasis** PELAGIC

**No standing still for Belgian prog metal quintet.**

The second album from Hippotraktor expands upon the concept of 2021's *Meridian*, exploring the reactions of a character encountering humans for the first time and experiencing everything from empathy to hatred.

It feels natural that Hippotraktor are labelmates to The Ocean and Psychonaut, sharing bandmember Stefan De Graef with the latter. All three groups freely explore the turbulent space where post-metal, djent, and prog crash into one another like colliding galaxies. Stefan De Graef shares vocals with guitarist Sander Rom, allowing them to switch between clean and distorted singing and even harmonise in *Silver Tongue*, not something commonly found in music this heavy.

The title track is a sludgy headbanger but it's not all crushing riffs. They drift and glide in the midsection of *The Indifferent Human Eye*, while *The Reckoning* begins with a tribal tom beat circling menacingly beneath an undulating guitar melody. The band's ability to move from spaced-out sections to frantic onslaughts in *Echoes* recalls early Mastodon. If young groups like Hippotraktor represent the future of prog metal, the genre is in safe hands. **DW**

# LAUGHING STOCK

**Shelter** APOLLON

**Sixth from Norwegians quivers between quiet and loud.**

Named after the final Talk Talk album, this Norwegian trio stress the connection by having a James Marsh artwork on their album cover. They can't magic up the same lightness of touch as their heroes, with the delineation between heavy bits and floaty bits signposted rather than subtle, but there are plenty of interesting moments on a deliberative, resonant record. Its theme of humanity versus nature is well served by the duel between restraint and excess.

Entering with oddly tuned guitar riffage, which becomes a recurring motif, Laughing Stock are less stodgy when they drift into melancholy reveries. The back and forth between their two preferred modes is seemingly non-negotiable. The title track murmurs enticingly, but can't resist breaking into epic emphases, overstatement muscling out enticing understatement. *Waterfall*, pleasingly, elects not to turn a river into a cascade, while *Flood*, which brings Tim Bowness in for a vocal cameo, bursts all its banks. Grungy thrash yields to from-the-heart earnestness, yet Bowness's poise lends it trustworthiness. Laughing Stock are better at calm than storm. **CR**

# NEKTAR

**Journey To The Other Side - Live** DEKO ENTERTAINMENT

**Marathon live set captures band reluctant to fade away.**

After frontman Roye Albrighton died in 2016, Nektar kept the flame alive through new work, 50th-anniversary gigs and an extensive reissue series. This lengthy live album feels, in context, both old and new. Sadly, it's become a tribute to another fallen comrade, as drummer/co-founder Ron Howden died three months after its recording in New Jersey.

It's a fitting testament, as, running over two and a half hours, it visits every era of the group's always solid, sometimes spectacular, output. It'd be overly polite to suggest that Albrighton, as singer, guitarist and fulcrum, is much missed, but the survivors honour the material, recreating it with something between respect and love. The long-time faithful will relish fluent run-throughs of catalogue peaks like *A Tab In The Ocean*, *Skywriter* and *Recycled 2*. The whole of 1973 album *Remember The Future*, their masterpiece, is, after some opening over-exuberance, played with the passion it deserves. *Drifting*, from their most recent album, shows they're still having good ideas. A worthy document, whether it proves to be a bookmark between career chapters or a well-earned swan song. **CR**

## THE OMNIFIC

### The Law Of Augmenting Returns WILD THING RECORDS

**Australian dual-bass trio return for a second virtuosic odyssey.**

Bassists are second only to drummers as the butt of music-based jokes, but two-thirds of The Omnific is made up of bass guitarists and their largely instrumental compositions revolve around the instrument. *'Bass, bass, bass…You know the place of bass, bass for you,'* sing guest barbershop pals on the opening song, titled *The Omnific ≈ Bass*, just in case there's still any doubt.

At times it does sound like multiple solos randomly strung together, but general bassists Matt Fackrell and Toby-Peterson Stewart, plus odd-man-out drummer Jerome Lematua, mould their virtuosic talents into individual tracks with their own idiosyncrasies. *Matrices* sounds like mathematical equations set to bass, complete with mid-song tricky back and breakthrough crescendo, *Double Malt Ditty* utilises a harder-hitting metallic edge alongside some chiptune-style bleeps and the title track brings in fellow four-string wizards Charles Berthoud and Kai Den Hertog, because sometimes two bass guitars just aren't enough.

The talent is undeniable but, just as importantly, they serve it up with humour and enough compositional skill to keep things interesting. **PT**

## PALLBEARER

### Mind Burns Alive NUCLEAR BLAST

**Prog-loving Arkansas doomsters drop their most reflective album yet.**

Ever since Black Sabbath set out the stall for heavy metal with a quivering tritone in 1970, there have been many bands content to rely on crushing weight alone. Pallbearer have certainly made use of preponderous riffs in the past, but they've also displayed a more reflective side and a deep understanding of progressive musical strokes.

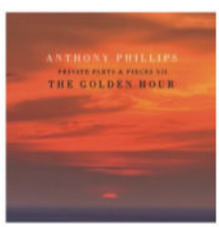
On *Mind Burns Alive* they explore these elements more extensively than ever before. *'We are frozen here, picking at the wounds we will not let heal,'* sings frontman Brett Campell on opener *Where The Light Fades*. This is an album that explores isolation, pain and mental breakdown, yet it does so without depending on monolithic slabs of distortion. There are some sonically heavy moments but they're balanced with restraint, melancholy and strategic moments of silence. Those progressive touches come not from complexity but from layers of shade, delicate dynamics that ebb and flow and the odd surprising move like the wash of saxophone that suddenly emerges from *Endless Place*.

Emotionally, Pallbearer remain heavy, but this is a subtle, meditative take on the dark night of the soul. **PT**

## ANTHONY PHILLIPS

### The Golden Hour - Private Parts & Pieces XII ESOTERIC

**Old, borrowed and new from ex-Genesis maestro.**




It's 46 years since Anthony Phillips released his first collection of compositional odds and ends. Taken collectively, the *Private Parts & Pieces* series has built into an invaluable chronicle of a master craftsman at work. Given that these consist of a potpourri of cast-offs, musical jottings and ideas left on the shelf, it's surprising how cohesive they are. Demonstrating just what a prolific and talented composer Phillips is, the latest instalment of this occasional series is arguably the best yet.

Unabashedly romantic in style, his chosen themes are impeccably elegant in both their expression and serene melodicism. The four-part *Wychmore Hill Suite* ripples with captivating themes whose deft melodies glisten with washes of 12-string and nylon guitar. With several moments across the album evoking the pastoral reveries integral to early Genesis, almost any of these exquisite and often tender tunes could easily be scaled up to receive a full band treatment. That they carry such impact even in the relatively pared-back settings with only the most minimal of treatments speaks volumes about the power of Phillips's writing. **SS**

## PROGRESSIVE FOLK

**Paul Sexton** travels from Melbourne to Northampton in the latest bucolic grab-bag.

**Winter McQuinn** has a varied CV: Aussie psych pop soft rocker, double Bachelor of Music graduate, frontman of Melbourne area pop candy quintet Sunfruits, freelance publicist at Third Eye Stimuli Records or co-founder of environmental music organisation Green Your Noise. A man of many parts, then, and all of them working, as is all the more obvious on *Move To The Trees* (Third Eye Stimuli). It delivers just under half an hour of mellow and melodic, 1970s-channelling tuneage with soft rock vocals, something of a Laurel Canyon bouquet and titles like *Daffodil* and *Honey*.

Back in Blighty, **John Bramwell** is well-known as the co-founder of erstwhile Manchester alt rockers and Mercury Prize nominees I Am Kloot. His latest solo work *The Light Fantastic* (Townsend Music) wafts into your senses with a harmonic flourish, the acoustic framework of *Leave No Traces* and the away-from-it-all sentiment of *A World Full Of Flowers*. Bramwell's open-hearted lyrics are matched by accessible melodies and simple arrangements, decorated with cello gilding to make a pleasing portrait.

Electric folksters **Albion** are the conception of Joe Parrish, and their *Lakesongs Of Elbid* (albionofficial.bandcamp.com) begins placidly on *The Lake Isle Of Innisfree* before hitting the rugged terrain of the dramatic instrumental *Arthurian Overture*. Its episodic echoes of Oldfield, Wakeman and Tull are inspired by Trevor Jones's 1998 music for the two-part TV series *Merlin*. The marriage of folk and prog metal continues on such tracks as *Pagan Spirit*, of which the album has plenty.

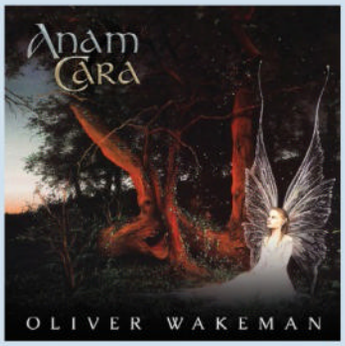
**David Ian Roberts**'s eponymous fifth album (Cambrian) is the latest example of an elegantly introspective style that has won him many admirers at the dailies and monthlies as well as at BBC Radio 2 and BBC Radio 6 Music. The beautiful piano-led *Kaleidoscope Rising In 3D* establishes a tasteful and scenic context enlarged upon by the hypnotic *Haven't You Heard?*, the similarly dreamy *Bottom Of Your Heart* and more.

Over nine years and three previous albums, the quartet **Banter** have honed a winning, customised style that will gain them even more fans on *Heroes* (Mrs Casey Music). That club already includes such folk overlords as Ralph McTell, Show Of Hands, Simon Nicol and Ashley Hutchings. Indeed the lead song *The Oak And The Ash* has hints of Fairport's latter-day signature, before they confound the boundary-keepers with the maritime yarning of *Picking A Ship*. Several tracks add keyboard player Nina Zella's new melodies to traditional lyrics, and there are spirited and refreshing remakes of Pete Coe's *Rolling Down The Ryburn* and John Tams' *Lay Me Low*.

# OLIVER WAKEMAN

## Anam Cara SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC

**Wakeman Jr loses himself on the Emerald Isle.**




With his 11th album, and first solely under his own name in 19 years, Oliver Wakeman swaps prog for a celtic sojourn. *Anam Cara* is a Gaelic phrase that means 'soul friend', someone who is a lifelong mentor, guide, and source of support, and Wakeman has assembled an admirable line-up of musicians to join him on his latest endeavour.

> **The pervading mood is overwhelmingly maudlin.**

Hayley Griffiths handles leads vocals and is no stranger to this sort of fare, having sung in the *Riverdance* stage show and released her own albums in this vein with 2011's *Celtic Rose* and 2022's *Far From Here*. Her range and control remain as impressive as they've ever been, and she brings passion and drama to the material. Nightwish's Troy Donockley is most modern prog musicians' first call for anyone seeking celtic pipes and whistles, so he's a natural fit for this project and features prominently throughout.

There's no faulting the performances or playing, but the album suffers from being overburdened with ballads. Seven of the 10 tracks are overwrought love songs, like *The View From Here* and *Here In My Heart*. Far too much of the material is cut from the same cloth and it starts to feel repetitive, both musically and lyrically. There are only so many times Griffiths can pour out her heart into a tune about missing an absent loved one before it loses its emotional potency.

As much as Wakeman seeks to tap into a celtic rock sound, he never really touches upon the tradition of Irish music made for dancing. There's nothing here in the vein of celtic rock groups like The Bothy Band, Horslips or Moving Hearts that suggests joy or even any sense of fun. Instead of conjuring the spirit of a good craic, the pervading mood is overwhelmingly maudlin.

The most ambitious piece is *Marble Arch*, the album's proggiest moment – a shape-shifting, multipart tale of spies and tragic romance. Even this begins in power ballad territory, but as the story develops, it moves into a swing section, then some shredding guitar soloing, through some classical poses, before returning to the power ballad feel. The stylistic shifts allow Wakeman to flex his compositional chops, although the lyrics can be clumsy with awkward lines like, *'Scientists aren't supposed to feel, it's the way it's always been.'* In the same vein, *Golden Sun In Grey* is a collection of laboured ocean metaphors including such as, *'My eyes are like a tide pool that reach towards your hand.'*

*Anam Cara* is admirable attempt by Wakeman to explore a new musical directions, but it's hard to shake the sense that it gets stuck in a musical rut.

**DAVID WEST**

# RELIQA

## Secrets Of The Future NUCLEAR BLAST

**EDM and nu metal mingle on Aussies' prog metallers' debut.**

The debut album from Australian quartet Reliqa is a very modern affair, touching on nu metal and EDM alongside prog metal. Vocalist Monique Pym switches between singing and a style that feels much closer to rapping when focusing on the rhythm of the words, rather than their pitch or melody.

The foundation of drums, bass and guitar is augmented by electronic dance music elements. The drop-tuned riff breakdowns speak to the nu metal influence, although that's balanced by the inclusion of guitar solos, which most bands from that scene eschewed as passé (notwithstanding arguments about whether they even possessed the chops for shredding).

In keeping with much contemporary metal, the band's sound is processed and compressed. There's no space in the mix and very limited dynamics; even the quiet parts are loud, which feels like another holdover from the 1990s. There's no harm in letting the music breathe and stretch now and again. It's easy to imagine how tracks like *Crossfire* and *Terminal* will go over big with festival crowds, but as an album, *Secrets Of The Future* threatens to become repetitive. **DW**

# RICHARD THOMPSON

## Ship To Shore NEW WEST RECORDS

**More brilliance from this singular and veteran talent.**

Unlike so many of the artists who started their careers in the 1960s, Richard Thompson has never succumbed to fallow periods or Fat Elvis eras. Any rare dips in quality control have been so few and far between that the return of this prodigiously talented singer, guitarist and songwriter is frequently cause for celebration. And so it proves again on *Ship To Shore*, his 19th solo album.

Reunited with guitarist Bobby Eichorn, bassist Taras Prodaniuk, and drummer Michael Jerome as well as singer Zara Phillips and augmented by fiddle player David Mansfield, Thompson and his band play with the confidence that comes with a comfort born from the pleasure of each other's company.

Thompson is in fine form throughout. A master of melody with a sense of generosity, the songs are suffused with wit and wisdom. *Life's A Bloody Show* is shot through with a defiance that refuses to pander to cynicism, while the spotlight given to Jerome flavours the narrative of *The Fear Never Leaves You*. The ensemble playing of *What's Left To Lose* gives space to Thompson's nimble fingers. Long may this voyage continue. **JM**

# TU-NER

## T-2 Tu-Ner For Lovers 7D MEDIA

**King Crimson and Stick Men acolytes join experimental forces again.**

Following only a few months after this supergroup trio debuted with *T-1 Contact Information*, *T-2 Tu-Ner For Lovers* has a title reflecting the slivers of dry humour they slip into their work – it's unlikely that it will be played during the smooch-friendly sections of any local wedding discos any time soon.

Still, it's a touch more inviting for newcomers than their, free-form debut. While it's said to be a live recording, such is the improvised feel of it, that may just mean they jammed it out in one take – hence there's a likeable groove to its best passages.

While Tu-Ner build around the instrumental tapestries of touch guitarist Markus Reuter, Trey Gunn's Warr guitar and Pat Mastelotto's polyrhythms, there's an atmospheric build to *You Returned For Me*, as if soundtracking a tale of star-crossed lovers set adrift in space with only an experimental jazz trio for company. *Triangle Of Love* works up a loose groove and there's a distinct dubby feel to *Cardboard Rendezvous* which, with the assistance of intoxicants, could transport the listener to far-flung places. Romantic? Perhaps not. Exotic and unusual? Most certainly. **JS**

## UBERMODO

**So Very Far From Home** TIMLANEMUSIC.BANDCAMP.COM

**A mission to the stars from the East Anglian space centre.**

Ubermodo is the alias of multi-instrumentalist Tim Lane and the titular home he speaks of being so very far away from is Norfolk, where he also plays with local prog heroes Stealing The Fire. On this, his third album under the name, Lane eschews the tricky time signatures and key changes of his other band for more straight ahead space rock, with drummer Tim Dem backing him across six psychedelic instrumental adventures in interstellar space.

Opener *Warlock Of The Outer Planes* sees the Tims buoyantly bursting through the earth's crust and burning through space, leaving cosmic tracers from Lane's fingers; he burns brightly on both the fretboard and the Moog. The title track then takes things down a notch as it meanders through ambient space at a gentler pace, imbuing us with the sense that we may never return. Later on comes *Beyond The Bones Of Eden*, which brings some exoticism to proceedings with its cosmic arabesque ululations, and concluding track *Behold! A Blade If Fire* unleashes the valedictory prog triplets with abandon. Quite right, too. It's an unashamedly bravura display and full marks for the outlandish titles. **JA**

## UNCLE ACID & THE DEADBEATS

**Nell' Ora Blu** RISE ABOVE

**Italian gialli music through the heavy Uncle Acid lens.**

After six years away, Kevin Starrs' stoner-psych luminaries return with a concept album that's a love letter to 70s Italian gialli and polizieschi – murder mystery, slasher and crime action films.

*Nell' Ora Blu* ('The Blue Hour') is a 19-track gumshoe epic splashed over two discs with some terrific 70s-inspired noir artwork, filled with dialogue alongside the music. Not only did Starrs compose the music but he put together a script in Italian, too. This enticed two of his favourite actors, Franco Nero, who provides the voice of the deranged Alpha male character, and Edwige Fenech, the French-Italian star of erotic comedies and horror hits, in 'damsel-in-distress' mode. It's an atmospheric listen where the Deadbeats' rock signature sinks back a little amid heavy synths, Latin, funk and trumpet. Reminiscent of Goblin, Air's *Virgin Suicides* and Tangerine Dream – Starrs used a Tangs-style Compact Phasing unit for *Il Ritorno Del Chiamante Silenzioso* – the stereo-panned production adds to the experience, which is sinister and sensuous, titles such as *Vendetta* and *L'omicidio* moving the story along. Immersive and groovy, it's a 'bravo!' from us. **JK**

## VMBRA

**Delapsvs** VMBRA-UK.BANDCAMP.COM

**Young Manchester band spreads their wings on theatrical second EP.**

Released 16 months after their debut EP, *Resvgram*, Manchester's Vmbra have burst out of their shell with *Delapsvs* and they're a much stronger prospect for it. Driven by Ai Sanchez's powerful, confident falsetto, they're more playful, weaving a greater variety of styles across its four tracks and diving deeper into the theatrical elements that shone in fleeting moments last time.

There's a delicate relationship between light and dark, gentle and bruising throughout. *Echelon* provides a smörgåsbord start, where folky acoustic guitars are paired with rolling Brian May riffs, layered vocal harmonies and a playful vocal rapport with Sanchez and guitarist Jack Hogg. A synth-lacquered space rock motif leads the way on *Make Us Smile*, while *Creed* makes excellent use of whisper-quiet breaks to maximise the impact of its intergalactic crescendos, proving the EP's impressive centrepiece. *No Trace* uses symphonic art and darkly dissonant math rock to colour its canvas as the band set their sights on a thrilling finale for what is an excellently scripted EP that packs theatrical pomp and oddball plot twists at every turn. **POW**

## AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

**Grant Moon** has a rummage down the back of the Prog sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

Multifaceted Argentinian artist **Gabriel Agudo** has sung regularly for The Steve Rothery Band, and the favour's returned on his ambitious second solo album. *Tales & Thunders* (bit.ly/GabrielAgudo) is an engaging selection of modern prog songs embracing everything from the moon landings to the pandemic. Rothery plays lead guitar, bass and drums on *Even To The Edge Of Doom*; Dave Foster and keyboard whiz Derek Sherinian are among the other high-calibre stars on this rewarding, gleamingly produced record, delivered with Agudo's signature gusto.

Led by versatile guitarist/vocalist Emil Moen, Norwegian quartet **Sykofant** bring together fusion's jazzy vocabulary, odd/funky grooves, early-Floyd psych and much more on their edgy and eclectic self-titled debut (on Sycophantastic Records). From fiddly opener *Pavement Of Color* to chewy 14-minuter *Forgotten Paths*, they straddle surf-, noise- and post-rock in exciting, melodic style.

Minneapolis symphonic outfit **Eynomia** follow their 2018 debut *Break Free* with *Sea Of Tears* (Mirror Image).

Accomplished singer Phyllis Rutter has an air of Heart's Ann Wilson about her, guitarist/writer Chris Bickley is nimble-fingered, and Symphony X's Mike LePond's here on bass. Together they purvey big, powerful symphonic metal with a Dream Theater dimension to it, one for fans of Nightwish, Epica et al.

The Mighty Ra bassist **Dave Francis** reveals himself as a strong vocalist and meaningful lyricist on his first solo work. *Beautiful Insanity* (bit.ly/DaveFrancis) is a hooky, vivacious, grassroots set with a retro rock/metal energy to it – Queensrÿche, Maiden and Purple come to mind, even Zappa on the sax-peppered *Queen Of Sad Thoughts*. Karnataka keyboardist Rob Wilsher is among the guest players on an earnest record that's progressive in scope.

**Billy Alexander** is best known as the founder of Rush tribute act turned actual band YYNot, and his first solo album *Rock & Roll Diary* (billyalexander.net) is a welcome blast of California sunshine. Sure, *Hammer Of The Gods* and *Water To Wine* owe much to those Canadians, but that's only part of the story. Alexander's honed, harmony-rich, catchy rock set feels like retuning time's dial back to the 1980s, when FM radio was awash with singles like his *Holding On To Love*. A positive, uplifting listen.

But Discovery Of The Month has to be Amanda Brooks-Byron, the sensational frontwoman for Hastings' **Ditch The Demon**. They're East Sussex's answer to Blood Ceremony, and full-length debut *Ain't Dead Yet* (Prozakville) is a hugely enjoyable mix of psych, prog and garage goth. Brooks-Byron surely spent her teenage nights before a mirror miming to Kate Bush, Siouxsie Sioux and Coven's Jinx Dawson. Like the band itself, she has range, power, character, and a cheeky glint in that (presumably) thickly mascara'd eye. Bet these guys are great live...

# COLOSSEUM

## Upon Tomorrow REPERTOIRE

**Fusion masters' scrapped 1971 studio album finally sees light of day.**

The last few years have seen a welcome surge of live recordings capturing Colosseum's lashing together of blues and rock within the progressive milieu of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The latest two-CD set showcases the band's pioneering spirit during that time. The first disc has audio-only from a 1969 TV show just days before their debut album, *Those Who Are About To Die Salute You*, hit the shops, with co-founders guitarist James Litherland and

> **It claims its place as a substantial addition to their discography.**

bassist Tony Reeves still present. It's joined by another set from 1970, originally filmed for cinematic release. This includes a truncated rendition of *The Valentyne Suite* from their celebrated second album of the same name, and an extended version of the mean and moody workout, *Downhill And Shadows*. While known for their jazzy prowess, it's a forceful reminder that they could give Led Zeppelin a good run for their money in the smokey blues department with Clem Clempson holding his own as a guitarist of considerable distinction.

Yet the most important reason to invest in this set can be found on the second CD, dedicated to a set of tracks that could have comprised Colosseum's fourth studio album had the band not imploded after 1970's *Daughter Of Time*. Recorded during the summer of 1971, with personal frustrations and musical differences sapping the band's spirits, these studio demos were shelved and ultimately forgotten. Martyn Hanson's informative notes in the accompanying booklet make the point that one of the reasons the band gave for quitting was a lack of suitable material. Yet several songs here, recently recovered from Jon Hiseman's archive, had previously been performed in concert. The studio recordings show the group working through their difficulties to create an ambitious and articulate set of numbers that is utterly convincing. But that wasn't how the group viewed the results; they duly went their separate ways.

However, posterity proves the multi-sectioned epic, *The Pirate's Dream*, clearly had legs. Dick Heckstall-Smith's underrated 1972 solo album, *A Story Ended*, revisited it, albeit with Chris Spedding instead of Clempson, by then with Humble Pie and ruefully referring to the piece as *The Pirates Nightmare*. Similarly, the number *Upon Tomorrow* was retooled when Hiseman included it in his first post-Colosseum project, Tempest, in 1973 with Allan Holdsworth. Boasting gutsy performances from all the participants, this new set makes a persuasive argument that had this 'lost' been released at the time it would have easily claimed its place as a substantial addition to Colosseum's discography.

**SID SMITH**

# JON ANDERSON

## In The City Of Angels FLOATING WORLD/VOICEPRINT

**Yes frontman caught going the whole hog for 80s pop and AOR.**

Received wisdom has it that the outdated progressive rock bands were brought down by the punk hordes in the late 70s. Although this was fanciful, into the 80s, smaller prog bands struggled, and the bigger groups had to think how they'd appear to the MTV generation.

Yes famously grew mullets, slapped on the hair gel and in 1983 got themselves some chart action with a new approach on *90125*. But on this 1988 solo album, Jon Anderson pushed further into the mainstream, recording in LA with members of Toto and enlisting producer Stewart Levine, who had worked with Simply Red and Randy Crawford. It was never going be another tale from the topographic oceans.

Two of the songs, the uptempo *Hold On To Love* and the sumptuous ballad *In A Lifetime*, were co-writes between Anderson and Lamont Dozier, inviting the idea that the singer was keen to follow Phil Collins, who also collaborated with the legendary Motown songwriter, in a career arc from pop-to-prog-to-pop. But the album only sold modestly and Anderson has admitted that his voice wasn't as suited to radio as Collins's. But while *In The City Of Angels* is full of 80s production gloss, with cool, spacious reverb, keyboards stabs and big drums, the former Yes singer sounds committed and animated, and his singing is strong throughout.

There's a funny crossover of styles. *Sundancing (For The Hopi/Navajo Energy)* mixes hippie-ish sentiments with a synth and keyboard extravaganza. *New Civilization* is a groovy, uptempo dance number, peppered with elliptical statements such as, *'We change our style/We change our style upon/This day called summer'* and a horn section that sounds like it belonged on a tune by Lionel Ritchie. *For You*, co-written with Toto's David Paitch, is reminiscent of Anderson's work with Vangelis, but overall *In The City Of Angels* is an interesting, albeit only partially successful, outlier in his career. **MB**

# BRIAN AUGER'S OBLIVION EXPRESS

## Live Oblivion Vols 1 & 2 SOUL BANK MUSIC

**Heavy, expressive fusion served hot.**

Brian Auger's brand of progressive, soulful blues caught flame in America in the late 60s and 70s while remaining more obscure in the UK. Bandleader and Hammond guru Auger had, of course, enjoyed UK Top 5 success of *This Wheel's On Fire* with Julie Driscoll and Trinity in 1968, yet his next venture, the more expansive, funky Oblivion Express, remained resolutely underground.

With recent releases *Straight Ahead* and *Closer To It* to promote, the Oblivion Express were captured live on their final dates of their US tour in April 1974 at Hollywood's famed Whisky A Go Go. "We were all absolutely performing at our height," Auger notes. "So, I decided that I really needed to record the band live at that point."

Thank heavens he did. Vocalist Alex Ligertwood had just re-joined after a sojourn with Troc, the band he'd formed with Jannick Top. With his warm, expressive voice, it's little wonder he would soon become Santana's principal vocalist. Drummer Steve Ferrone and bassist Barry Dean keep the rhythm tight, and Jack Mills's guitar playing is such *Prog* ponders why he is not more revered.

But it is undeniably Auger's show – his keyboards are front and centre, yet never overwhelming – for example, the sweet and subtle reading of Wes Montgomery's *Bumpin' On Sunset* effortlessly expands over 10 minutes on the first set. *Live Oblivion Volume 1* came out in 1974, and the response was so positive, the rest of the set was released on a second volume, this time a double, in 1976. Fusion was the order of the day – a Rizla could be put between the instrumental passages of this, and, say, *Relayer* by Yes. Yet Auger and his team approach the material – a mixture of covers and originals – through an old-fashioned UK jazz sensibility. The groove is never lost and although there is a lot of soloing, everything here serves the tunes – just listen to the groovy economy of their cover of Marvin Gaye's *Inner City Blues*. **DEA**

## EDGAR BROUGHTON BAND

### Gone Blue - The BBC Sessions ESOTERIC

**Four-CD collection of Beeb sessions between 1969-73, including 32 unreleased tracks.**

"There are few bands I'd rather see than the Edgar Broughton Band," John Peel once declared in his Disc & Music Echo column. Such fandom wasn't difficult to understand. Apart from their raw theatricality, EBB were an underground outfit who stood for the community, sounded like a wild British iteration of Beefheart and saw music as an agent of social change.

Beginning with a spot on Peel's *Top Gear* radio show in January 1969, EBB recorded nine sessions and two *In Concert* shows for the BBC over a four-year period. This impressive set features all of those surviving appearances, documenting a band during a clamorous creative peak that spanned psych-weird debut *Wasa Wasa* and 1973's more expansive *Oora*. West Coast vibes predominate early on. The trio – singer/guitarist Rob 'Edgar' Broughton, brother Steve on drums and bassist Arthur Grant – channel Zappa and Pearls Before Swine on *For What You Are About to Receive* and *There's No Vibrations, But Wait!*

Victor Unitt's arrival as extra guitarist in 1970 brings a heavier element to songs like *The House Of Turnabout* and the following year's savagely distorted *Call Me A Liar*, by which point EBB were firmly established as socio-political activists who'd rather play for free than align themselves to music biz norms. "We're trying to put idealism into practice," Edgar explains to *Top Gear* interviewer Brian Matthew. Aired in July 1971, the folk-leaning *Poppy* is an anti-pollution song way before it became a matter of national debate. *Got Mad* is a percussive anti-war piece that rushes into an explosive finale. By 1972's *The Rake*, recorded for *Sounds Of The 70s*, Broughton looks set to escape what he perceives as a ruinous world.

The two *In Concert* gigs are testament to EBB's dogged power, with *Freedom* and an immense version of Beefheart's *Dropout Boogie* as lengthy standouts. As is 14-minute calling card *Out Demons Out*, which feels less like an exorcism than a noisy hymn to simple communion. **RH**

## CARMEN

### The Albums 1973-1975 ESOTERIC

**Flamenco fusionistas three-CD retrospective.**

If there's ever going to be a movie biopic of 70s Anglo-American outfit Carmen, the pitch would be 'Flamenco music and dancing meets progressive rock'. Although viewed as a musical oddity, they were befriended by David Bowie, and their first two albums, *Fandangos In Space* (1973) and *Dancing On A Cold Wind* (1974) secured the services of producer Tony Visconti.

While mixing different styles and genres was key to achieving their sound, Carmen doesn't just rely on founder David Clark Allen's fearsomely precise guitar to do the job but also imports flamenco's signature hand clapping, the percussive foot-stomping and numerous rousing cries of '*Olé!*' into the mix. Allen's admiration for prog contemporaries including Yes and Genesis is detectable in the writing as Mellotrons, Moogs and a penchant for dramatic contrasts make their presence felt. While this gives Carmen many opportunities to showcase their obvious instrumental prowess, the vocals often come with an over-the-top, macho swagger that feels somewhat anachronistic today.

Having parted company with Visconti, their third album from 1975, *The Gypsies*, continues in much the same vein though there are some shifts toward a more commercial mainstream direction. *Come Back* wilts under the weight of cheesy hooks while *Shady* Lady, whose chorus *'She's a shady lady and she make you cry... she'll tell you lies'* is as lame as it sounds. Despite high-profile support slots with the likes of Jethro Tull, whom Carmen bassist John Glasscock would go on to join, the band hung up their castanets due to dodgy management and public indifference.

While there's some decent material on those three albums – all contained within Esoteric's traditional clamshell packaging – it's often trampled by their insistence on shoehorning various flamenco motifs and thunderously fancy footwork into the songs whether they need it or not, making such inclusions overbearing, gratuitous and, ultimately, too much of a gimmick. **SS**

## NORDIC GIANTS

### Origins NICE WEATHER FOR AIRSTRIKES

**Instrumental post-rockers Rôka and Löki reassess their past.**

Ahead of a new studio album slated for September, Nordic Giants have decided to undertake a little housekeeping, reshaping the earliest songs from their catalogue. *Origins* duly revisits 2010's debut EP *A Tree As Old As Me*, plus both sides of standalone singles *Shine* and *Speed The Crow's Nest*, alongside the epic *Dark Clouds Mean War*. All of these tracks predate the self-styled "claustrophobic cinema clutter" of their first album (2015's *A Séance Of Dark Delusions*), prompting a sonic makeover more befitting of the inscrutable duo's recent work.

> **It serves to bridge the furthest extremes of the Giants' sound.**

Freshly recorded guitars, piano, synths, drums and strings give these songs a greater dynamic range – and a crisper, cleaner fidelity – that serve to bridge the furthest extremes of the Giants' sound. Huge, dramatic swells heighten the urgency of opening cut *Together*, which uses samples from key Martin Luther King speeches, particularly 1967's 'Beyond Vietnam' address. An intense ride, the music underscores society's need for *'a radical revolution of values'* and the imminent peril of being *'dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.'* It's a call to humanity, and a quest for moral conviction, that still resonates, of course. And one that the Giants would repeat on *A Séance Of Dark Delusions*, whose similarly-pointed *Spirit* also samples MLK.

By contrast, Rod Steiger's impassioned turn as Napoleon in 1970's *Waterloo*, making his abdication speech to the Old Guard at Fontainebleau, forms the spine of *Dark Clouds Mean War*. It's a brilliantly-measured piece, with Rôka and Löki building the musical drama with piano and synths, gradually rising into something symphonic. As Steiger becomes more histrionic, screaming "Remember me!", a great fanfare crashes around him, finally subsiding into the faded echo of a man broken by his own hubris. Like Sigur Rós or This Will Destroy You, it's further proof that Nordic Giants are capable of stirring the emotions at a visceral level.

There's plenty of subtlety here, too. The rippling piano that ushers in Jake Reid's faintly sinister guest turn on *The Seed* is delicacy itself, embellished with minimal snare rolls. Regular collaborator Freyja is fittingly Liz Fraser-like on the Cocteau Twins glow of *Glass Skinned Girl*, a violin peeking through its ambient haze. *'We are stars/Trapped inside skin and bone,'* sings Cate Ferris on *Shine*, which expands into a thundering rock epiphany, her voice mutating from gentle incantation to quasi-religious rapture, the whole thing serving as a perfect illustration of the Giants' mighty aesthetic.

**ROB HUGHES**

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## STEVE HACKETT

**Till We Have Faces/Feedback '86** INSIDEOUTMUSIC

**Two mid-80s solo LPs newly remastered for 180g vinyl.**

Like the rest of prog's old guard, Steve Hackett was acutely aware of the 'adapt or die' climate of the mid-80s. "Record companies would say, 'I don't hear a career song,'" the guitarist recalled in 2022, explaining his more mainstream direction on *Feedback '86* .

Actually made between 1984-1987, first released in 2000, and echoing the AOR-style of GTR, Hackett's short-lived supergroup with Steve Howe, the album had one eye on MTV and another on film soundtracks. Big choruses with star-turn assists are go, thus Bonnie Tyler and Manfred Mann's Earth Band singer Chris Thompson duet impressively on *Prizefighters*, and Brian May, Hackett and Thompson all sing on *Slot Machine*, wherein gambling is a metaphor for love's vicissitudes.

Though other songs on *Feedback '86* are more hamstrung by the clunky digital tech of the time (*Don't Fall*), the LP sounds less scattershot than 1984's *Till We Have Faces*, a work with which it shares some DNA. Both records feature *Stadiums Of The Damned* and *Gulf*, the former an odd, sample-rich song about football-fan violence whose lyrics *'If you stare at me, you will pay the price'* now seem a tad too heavy-handed. *Gulf*, meanwhile, is a flamenco guitar-imbued look at the Iran-Iraq War.

It's Brazil, though, that inspires the greater part of *Till We Have Faces*. The LP was largely recorded in the country and features a number of Brazilian drummers and percussionists. Again, Hackett was ahead of the game, since Paul Simon's *The Rhythm Of The Saints* didn't appear until 1990. But while Simon's LP embraced Brazilian music fully, *Till We Have Faces* also features such sonic wildcards as the koto-imbued A *Doll That's Made In Japan* and Hackett's brief instrumental cover of the old Disney classic *When You Wish Upon A Star*. The resultant effect is just a little unfocused, leaving *Till We Have Faces* more of a curio than an eclectic Hackett classic. **JMN**

## MAYBESHEWILL

**Fair Youth** INSIDEOUTMUSIC/SUPERBALL MUSIC

**Revisiting a sun-drenched slice of post-rock.**

Leicester's Maybeshewill celebrate the 10th anniversary of their fourth album as *Fair Youth* returns in a newly remixed and remastered edition. Bassist Jamie Ward, who handled the remix, declared his intention to bring out the finer details of the arrangements and to make the music audibly hit harder. Upon its initial release, this record found Maybeshewill moving further away from the distorted guitars of their previous albums, heading into dreamier sonic territory, so hard-hitting isn't necessarily what the music itself suggests.

Based purely on the album's vibe, it's tempting to imagine 2014 as some sort of halcyon era, although the geopolitical events of the year don't lend themselves to that interpretation. Perhaps it's more cogent to read the album as a work of escapism, something to soothe the senses and provide a welcome balm to ease the irritations of life. In that regard, it's a different experience to the acerbic edges of *Not For Want Of Trying* from 2008, and its immediate predecessor 2011's *I Was Here For A Moment, Then I Was Gone*. Here, the overall sound is gentle, with percolating synth lines that provide a comfortable mattress for the rest of the music to sit upon. The guitars paint in soft pastels and the mood is a warm, uplifting one.

*Fair Youth* may not possess the distorted riffs of their earlier work, but the sense of drama and dynamics remains intact. *You And Me And Everything In Between* builds from a sparse piano ostinato into sweeping vistas of layered guitars, while the title track is sprightly and light on its feet. There's an intriguing, off-kilter beat to *All Things Transient* that prevents the track from becoming musical wallpaper just hanging in the background. Credit to Jamie Ward, the mix is bright and articulate. The album is available on hot pink and black marbled vinyl, which looks glorious in the photos although the physical edition wasn't available at time of review. **DW**

## PINK FLOYD

**Animals: Dolby Edition** WARNER MUSIC

**Prog legends' 'punkest' record gets the Dolby Atmos Blu-ray treatment.**

Pink Floyd have always been looking for ways to make listening more imitative of how the human brain perceives sound. In 1967, they became the first group to present their music live with a custom-built quadraphonic speaker system and a panning control device they nicknamed the Azimuth Coordinator. More recently, there has been a plethora of spatial audio editions of *The Dark Side Of The Moon* to celebrate its 50th anniversary.

> **The pitch-shifting synth solo on *Dogs* lasers the brain.**

The scuffle for repackaged *Animals* products has been less frenzied. It's the black sheep of their 70s era, a challenging, sometimes confrontational album that nevertheless sold four million copies. Given a Dolby Atmos 5.1 surround sound remix by James Guthrie in 2018, that mix has made it to Blu-ray six years later, with added high resolution stereo and 5.1 mixes and the 1977 original stereo mix.

During the listening session *Prog* is invited to, we count nine speakers around the room with six on the ceiling (such optimal listening conditions aren't essential — it can still be listened to on Dolby Atmos headphones, soundbars or home speaker set-ups). Opener *Pigs On The Wing*, with Roger Waters' voice accompanied by a single acoustic guitar, is not what spatial sound was designed for, though the contrast with the oncoming *Dogs* serves to highlight the flatness of stereo and the panoramic density of Atmos. David Gilmour's overdubbed duelling guitars arrive and they become conversational as they reverberate on either side of the room, and then the pitch-shifting synth solo lasers the brain as the clutter is distributed evenly around the room.

*Pigs (Three Different Ones)* also benefits from spatial separation, with Mike Oldfield-like ostinatos becoming airborne, and the use of a vocoder — incongruous on the original — sounding like it was placed here for this very moment. The distorted animal noises are less scratchy, and Floyd start to sound like the musique concrète pioneers they were, rather than keepers of a farmful of flatulent quadrupeds. It's really the space rock of *Sheep*, though, that's the pinnacle, with Nick Mason's opening fills hitting synapses as we ping through several dimensions within a few seconds. What might have once caused audible cognitive dissonance becomes multi-textural and multi-dimensional.

It's been noted many times before that *Animals* is Pink Floyd's harshest-sounding record, coming out in 1977, the year punk broke. If its rougher sound was in any way subliminally influenced by Johnny Rotten wearing antagonistic "I hate Pink Floyd" T-shirts, then this version definitively claims the record back for proggers everywhere. **JEREMY ALLEN**

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# JEAN LUC PONTY

## Life Enigma EARMUSIC

**Vinyl reissue of French violin legend's millennial comeback album.**

When Jean Luc Ponty first released *Life Enigma* in 2001, it had been nine years since his last studio album. Coasting on a series of 'best of's and live excursions, there was a suspicion that the normally prolific electronic violinist was ready to enter the pantheon and embrace his rich heritage – and there'd be no shame in that, given the heft of his musical yield up to that point. *Life Enigma* isn't a riposte, exactly; it nevertheless dispelled any suggestion that Ponty was a spent force creatively.

Billed as a throwback to the Atlantic years, where the Frenchman enjoyed a roaringly successful 10-year-period between 1975 and 1985, it's an album that's more forward thinking than any implication of revisiting former glories. Ponty's previous two albums had been collaborative efforts, one with Al Di Meola and Stanley Clarke (*The Rite Of Strings*) and the other with a company of African musicians (*No Absolute Time*). Here, he's largely solo at his own Enigmatic Studio, with longtime bandmates making guest appearances rather than coming together collectively.

Ponty programmes most of the drums and percussion himself, which throws up the confounding realisation that the world's most famous fusion violinist is au fait with drum'n' bass, having a decent stab at a variation on the genre on one of the record's highlights, *Signals From Planet Earth*. *The Infinite Caravan* brings together synthy electronics with Latin grooves, though because of the nature of recording at home, it all feels a lot more contained and intimate than the expansive 70s ever did. *Pizzy Cat*, where Ponty digs out his Synclavier, gives everything an unusually hyperreal sheen. Only *Firmament*, the centrepiece with a full band jamming, really throws up anything overtly human, albeit virtuosic (pianist William Lecomte dazzles over his allotted bars). *Life Enigma* only made it onto CD last time around; now with a full vinyl release for the first time, it benefit from the added warmth that format provides. **JA**

# TARJA

## What Lies Beneath EARMUSIC

**Former Nightwish singer revisits her second solo album.**

Originally released in 2010, *What Lies Beneath* was an important album for Tarja Turunen. Having helped establish the whole concept of symphonic metal with Nightwish, the singer was dismissed in 2005 – a move some fans have still not managed to get over. Following a throwaway Christmas-themed collection, her first solo album proper, *My Winter Storm*, was a largely disappointing set with a heavy reliance on outside writers. The follow-up was far more focused and the singer had input on the writing throughout. In many respects it was the real start of Tarja's solo career and tracks like *Dark Star* and *Falling Awake* remain firm fan favourites.

This reissue comes in remastered double CD and vinyl versions, bringing together all bonus tracks and a slew of alternative versions. It still begins with original opener *Anteroom Of Death*, which remains the most eyebrow-raising track on offer; a clash of heavy riffs, harpsichord and a striking performance from a capella metal group Van Canto. Elsewhere it's more straightforward, mixing hard rock and balladry with (largely) toned down symphonic elements. It lacks the compositional skills of Nightwish mastermind Tuomas Holopainen but it still works as a roadworthy vehicle for Tarja's spectacular operatic vocals.

The bonus material is a mixed bag. Radio mixes are seldom more interesting than the originals, but this also includes Tarja's guest spot on the Scorpions' *The Good Die Young* and her own evocative *Montañas De Silencio*, which was initially limited to US versions. The reissue also features three versions of *Falling Awake*. The original album featured a blazing star turn from Joe Satriani, but the guide version from Tarja's own longterm guitar partner Julián Barrett has a better flow and Jason Hook from Five Finger Death Punch proves surprisingly dexterous. The quality of the extras might vary but it's a nice package for completists and a worthy reissue of a largely impressive album. **PT**

# SQUACKETT

## A Life Within A Day ESOTERIC

**Prog titans' collab re-emerges with 5.1 Blu-ray surround mix included.**

Twelve years have now flown by since these two prog luminaries released what was then a much-anticipated collaboration. Well-received in 2012, appreciation of this reissued version may well be heightened due to the enduring strength of the material and because the death of Chris Squire means a follow-up never happened.

The omnipresence of Steve Hackett collaborator Roger King on keyboards, in the producer's chair and as co-writer

> **Superbly executed, with showboating from both principals.**

with Squire and Hackett on every single track tilts the balance towards the feel of the former Genesis guitarist's solo oeuvre, rather than the output of his four-stringed compatriot. This manifests as a stately, spooky grandiosity. But Squire still marks his presence throughout, with some signature trebly, knotty bass work, but also via the inclusion of a few lighter, more playful themes and some distinctly Yes-like melodies and shifts of gear. There's also an unexpected heaviness and relentlessness to the drums on of certain tracks, with sometime King Crimson man Jeremy Stacey bringing a *Kashmir* thump to proceedings at key junctures.

The opening title track lives up to its name, sweeping through a series of moods including brooding eastern orchestrations reminiscent of the aforementioned Zep classic, and break-neck jazzy sprint recalling beloved Squire solo cut *Silently Falling*, augmented by searing Hackett fret runs.

Elsewhere, the fusing of the talents of Hackett, Squire and King, while retaining echoes of their illustrious track records, quite often creates a relaxed, lustrous Floydian ambience, not least on the Squire-led tracks *Can't Stop The Rain* and *Aliens*. The latter features the none-more-prog theme of our extra terrestrials revealed as human tourists from the future, popping back for a gawp at their race's ancient history.

Elsewhere, *The Summer Backwards* combines the foreboding feel of Hackett-era Genesis highlight *Entangled* with ELO at their most luscious. *Sea Of Smiles* is the closest the album comes to declamatory Yes harmonies, married neatly to Gabriel-esque acoustic percussion and throwing in a fiery Hackett electric break.

In short, *A Life Within A Day* is a superbly-executed album with uniformly powerful songs, topped with much enjoyable instrumental showboating from both principals. It's a shame they never had the opportunity to do some live dates, perhaps augmented by Hackett vocalist Nad Sylvan and/or Yes's Jon Davison to help realise the richness of the recorded version. But let's nevertheless be thankful that we have this excellent set, one that more than lived up to its promise as a combination of two masters of the prog genre.

**PAUL GING**

# Take a bow

## JETHRO TULL

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | THE LONDON PALLADIUM |
| DATE | 23/04/2024 |

The past and the present meet.

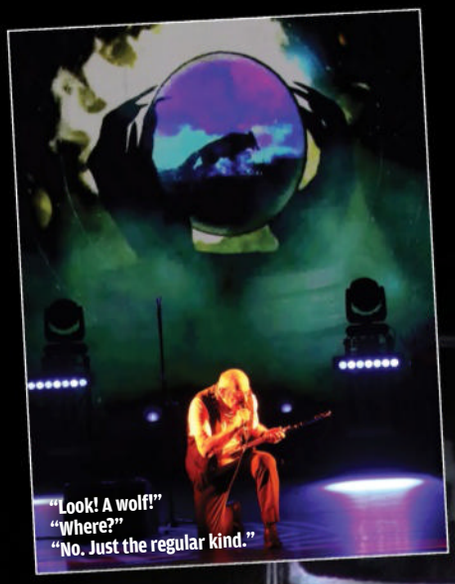
"If that didn't make you depressed, this one certainly will," chuckles Ian Anderson as he leads the current line-up of Jethro Tull into a barnstorming version of *Dark Ages,* a chilling look at climate change that Anderson wrote for 1979's *Stormwatch* album, although the subject was something the bandleader had been addressing since he wrote *Skating Away (On The Thin Ice Of The New Day)* for 1974's *War Child*. *Dark Ages* had been preceded by *Mrs Tibbets*, from 2022's *The Zealot Gene,* with its strident message warning of the perils of extremism and right-wing populism via the mother of the man who dropped the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. Both songs are enhanced, as are all of the evening's tunes, with bold imagery courtesy of the large screen, and they're perfect examples of Anderson's sense of drama and theatre, and his inquisitive mind. It's something that has always set Tull and their leader apart, and continues to do so.

It's a packed Palladium that welcomed Anderson and band to the stage earlier in the evening, opening the first of two hour-long sets with deep cuts *My Sunday Feeling* from the band's 1968 debut album *This Was*, followed by another early years song in *We Used To Know* (from 1969's chart-topping *Stand Up*), before 1978's *Heavy Horses* really seems to get the party started. By this point Anderson, band and audience are up and running, albeit figuratively for the latter.

Artists can't move these days without intense, often unwanted or undeserved scrutiny and comment and like many, Tull aren't exempt from this. But this *is* Jethro Tull, whether your favourite ex-member isn't in the line-up or not. That's simple fact. As for Ian's voice, another, perhaps more understandable bugbear for some of late, well to our ears he's in better voice tonight than this writer has heard for several years. Yes, he strains occasionally, but he's 76 years old! *Prog* would be happy with half that vim, voice and vigour during a two-hour set every night!

A jaunty *Weathercock* eases into a direct *Roots To Branches* and an unseasonal but certainly not unwelcome *Holly Herald* from *The Jethro Tull Christmas Album*, before the first of two of the evening's contemporary choices from the latest album *RökFlöte*, an ominous *Wolf Unchained* replete with suitably lupine imagery on the screens, followed by an elegant *Mine Is The*

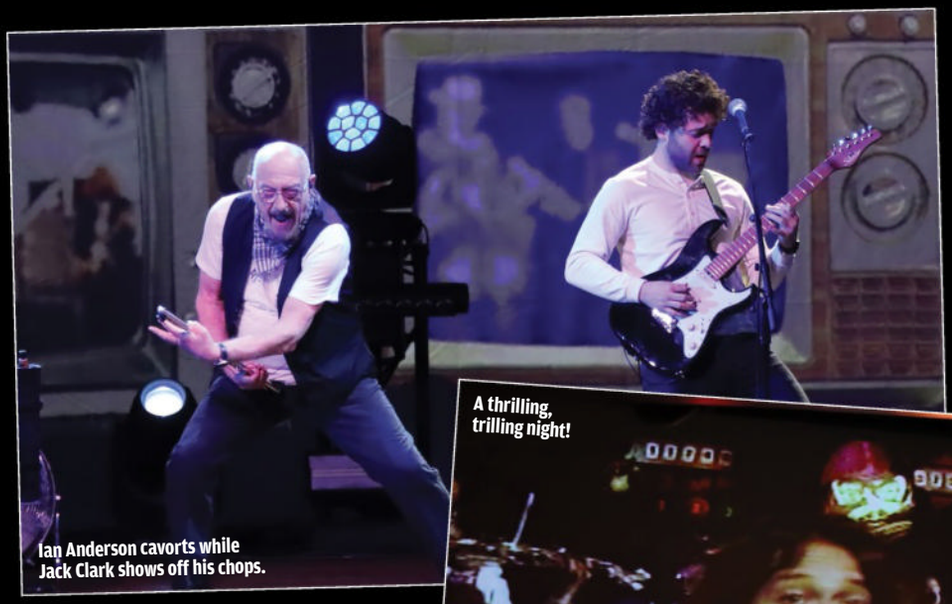
John O'Hara: Hail Santa!



"Look! A wolf!"
"Where?"
"No. Just the regular kind."

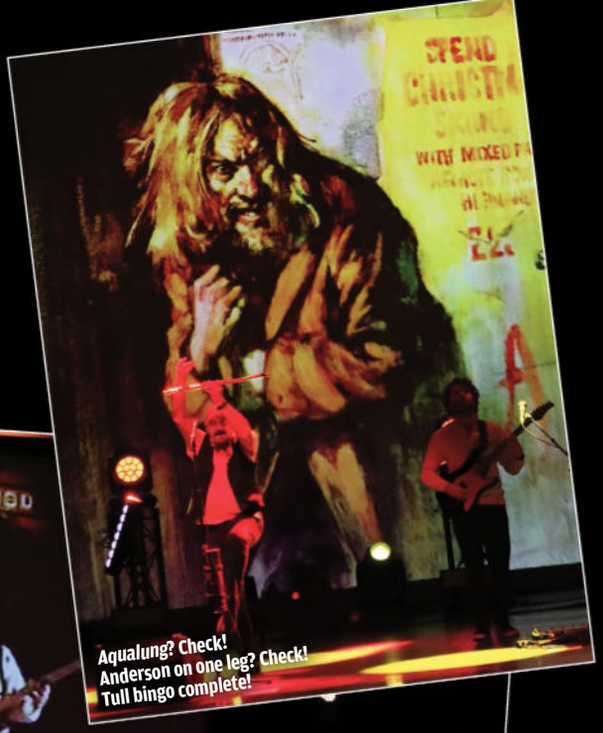
Jethro Tull: one in the face for the haters.

PRESS/MARTIN WEBB



Ian Anderson cavorts while Jack Clark shows off his chops.

A thrilling, trilling night!



Aqualung? Check! Anderson on one leg? Check! Tull bingo complete!

*Mountain* from *The Zealot Gene*, before the crowd-pleasing *Bourrée In E Minor* brings the first half of the show to a close in style.

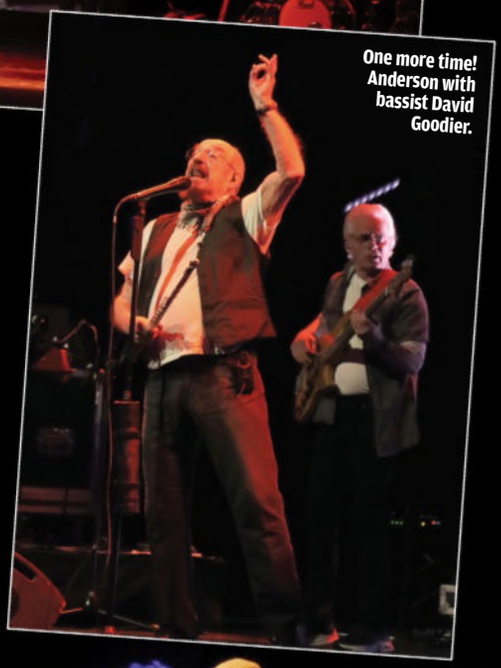
The band open the second set with an excellent reading of 1987's *Farm On The Freeway*, which allows new guitarist Jack Clark to show his chops, while Anderson cavorts around the stage, fluting maniacally. Whether by accident or design, the rest of the band – bassist Dave Goodier, drummer Scott Hammond and impressively bearded keyboard player John O'Hara (who injects some serious prog into the evening's proceedings) – stick stoically to their musical tasks. A display of a bit more character wouldn't go amiss, although Anderson's engaging and seemingly never-ending antics continue to capture the attention.

**"Ian Anderson is in better voice tonight than this writer has heard for several years. Detractors be damned, there's a lot more life in Jethro Tull just yet."**

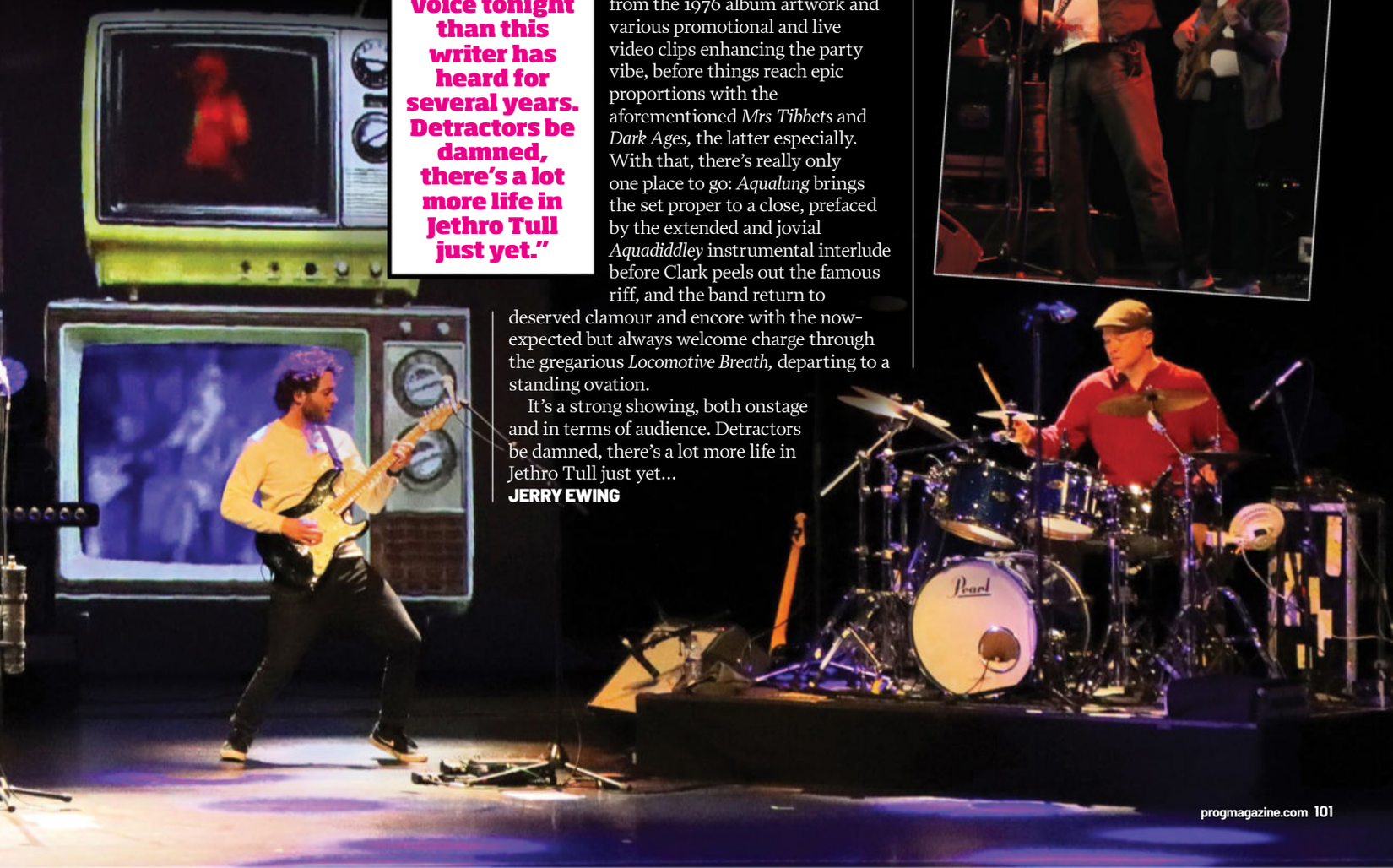
An unexpected but rapturously received *Too Old To Rock'n'Roll, Too Young To Die* appears midway through the second half, and damn near raises the roof, imagery from the 1976 album artwork and various promotional and live video clips enhancing the party vibe, before things reach epic proportions with the aforementioned *Mrs Tibbets* and *Dark Ages*, the latter especially. With that, there's really only one place to go: *Aqualung* brings the set proper to a close, prefaced by the extended and jovial *Aquadiddley* instrumental interlude before Clark peels out the famous riff, and the band return to deserved clamour and encore with the now-expected but always welcome charge through the gregarious *Locomotive Breath*, departing to a standing ovation.

It's a strong showing, both onstage and in terms of audience. Detractors be damned, there's a lot more life in Jethro Tull just yet...

**JERRY EWING**



One more time! Anderson with bassist David Goodier.



## MEW WITH DANISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | BARBICAN HALL, LONDON |
| DATE | 03/04/2024 |

Rock bands playing with orchestras isn't always an idea which works. Sometimes the two elements can pull against each other or sit awkwardly, as if on a mismatched blind date. And sometimes the strategy just comes across as an ego-trip from a band wanting to look fancy, as if they reckon their songs deserve something more grandiose than "mere" rock music.

This absolutely isn't the case tonight, as the emotive proggy spacepop of Mew enjoys a blissful marriage with their tuxedoed compatriots' strings and horns. The two powerful forces mesh and gel with almost telepathic shrewdness, and the already lofty material of the band is lifted sky high. For newcomers, it's a revelation. For longterm believers, it's cause for happy tears.

Since forming in Copenhagen in the mid-90s and gaining international attention from fans of everyone from Radiohead to REM with 2003's *Frengers* album, the band, a trio since guitarist of 20 years Bo Madsen left in 2015, have eased up in the studio. There hasn't been an album for seven years. They have, however, explored new ways to present their live sound, and tonight express pleasure at bringing this show to the UK. It's clear it means a lot to them, and the spellbinding mix of beauty and energy shows why.

Singer Jonas Bjerre, bassist Johan Wohlert and drummer Silas Jørgensen shuffle on quite bashfully, dressed in black, bar the elven Bjerre's bright-red trainers. There's a quiet confidence too though, as the sound beds in instantly. By the time they hit early stand-outs like *The Zookeeper's Boy* and *Special*, they're cruising. Bjerre's ultra-high voice is a thing of wonder. Evoking an alchemical brew of Jon Anderson and Sigur Rós's Jónsi, it's angelic but never anodyne. There's also some Yes DNA in the music, but Mew's generational connection with bands like Mercury Rev or Flaming Lips twists that around. Pop music's not their enemy, as *Saliva* – "This one's about French kissing" – attests. Fun is allowed: fresh-faced live guitarist Mads Wegner, who looks like he's wandered in on loan from Busted or McFly but shreds like a dervish, even gets the string section, who are of mature years, headbanging with him.

A beloved signature anthem which defines a set can be an albatross for a band, but Mew accept that there's only one track the audience want as an encore. That's *Comforting Sounds*, the nine-minute psych-folk edifice, which milks a poignant chord sequence with repetition and layering until it swallows the building. Son of *Starship Trooper*, anyone? As a reaction, they then offer a "world première" of new song *Gliding*, which treads water, before winning the room back with another fan favourite, *Am I Wry? No*. Ovations ensue. Life-affirming.

**CHRIS ROBERTS**

## HAWKWIND

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | O2 CITY HALL, NEWCASTLE |
| DATE | 05/04/2024 |

The mighty Hawkwind capture The Spirit Of The Age... and then some!

DAVID WALA

The warriors on the edge of time (or maybe borrowed time, of which more later) breeze into the toon on a Friday night and land at a respectably attended but not heaving City Hall, on the very day their new album also touches down on Planet Earth. Three select cuts from *Stories From Time And Space* have been inserted into the set, as Hawkwind further burnish their current incarnation's reputation for running a tight live ship.

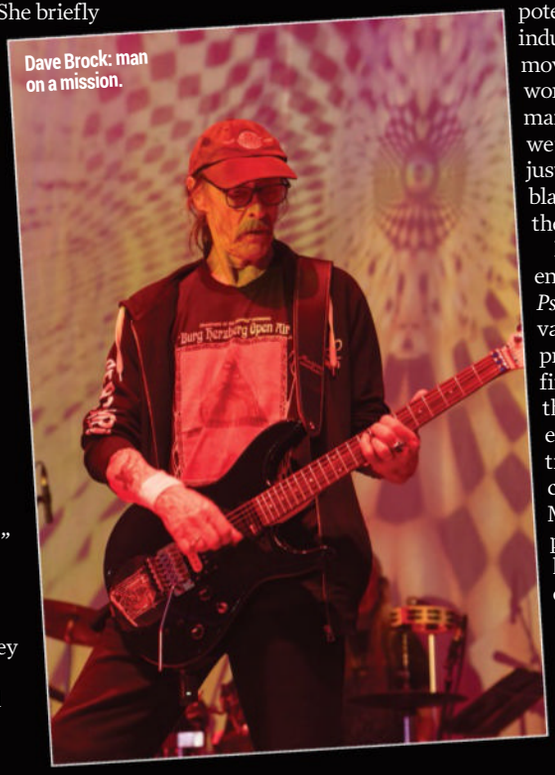
An upbeat Dave Brock also reveals that it was here in "Noocarsoo", back in 1979, that he first met his wife, Kris. She briefly appears and gives this story a confirmatory wave from the wings.

Proceedings lift off with a fast-boogieing, rip-roaring *Brainbox Pollution*, lasers firing on just as many cylinders as the band. Brock banters with de facto co-frontman Magnus Martin during the introduction to *Arrival In Utopia*, asking his fellow guitarist if we'll ever actually get there. "Don't think so," responds Magnus. "Not looking good, is it?" Undeterred by Martin's downbeat assessment of indefinite real-world delay, the musical journey towards the shining citadel nevertheless still sparkles, with bubbling synth patterns unleashed by Thighpaulsandra that add to the song's sheer, well, Hawkwind-ness, adding to the consolatory balm of utopian non-arrival.

> **"Returning for the encore, Magnus Martin announces, 'Dave has gone for his Horlicks. He's doing well, though, isn't he?'"**

The band power moodily through the new album's reflective *Till I Found You* and deliver a stonking, stalls-shaking, *The Psychedelic Warlords*.

But it's with a transcendent *Assault And Battery* where the 'shrooms really seem to kick in for those standing in the rows ahead of *Prog*, judging by the frenzied shape-throwing and potentially traction-inducing 'dance' moves. Don't worry, City Hall management, we're sure it was just the cider and black going to their head.



Dave Brock: man on a mission.

More bedlam ensues during *Psi Power*, with various fruggers pressing their fingers to their temples in emphasis of the titular, two-word chorus. Magnus Martin in particular shows his guitar mettle on this song, with indefatigable veteran drummer

Those lasers could put someone's eye out...

You'd Better Believe It! Veteran drummer Richard Chadwick.

Thighpaulsandra shows us why two keyboards are always better than one.

Magnus Martin and Doug MacKinnon lock and load.

Richard Chadwick punishing his kit, while still contributing to backing vocals.

Although customarily happy to let others have the spotlight, 82-year-old Brock has by no means become an android replica and puts his shoulder to the wheel throughout. He reels off some pleasingly gnarly lead lines on an absolutely throbbing *Spirit Of The Age*, his enthusiasm matched by Doug Mackinnon's bouncing bass line, exhorting the crowd to join in the singing. The good burghers of Tyneside, not being cryonically chilled like the love interest in the song's narrative, duly oblige.

Despite spirits and temperatures peaking, the frigid theme continues with new album highlight *Frozen In Time*, which Magnus Martin sniggeringly introduces as being about Sunderland. This elicits an amused cheer from most of the audience, with a couple of catcalls mixed in, the latter presumably from those who come from A Land Down Sunder. An epic *Brainstorm* closes out the set proper.

Returning for the encore of *You'd Better Believe It*, Magnus Martin announces, "Dave has gone for his Horlicks. He's doing fucking well, though, isn't he?"

Mirroring his earlier despondent mood when assessing our non-proximity to utopia, Martin hesitatingly continues, "We don't want this to be the last run of Hawkwind gigs, but you never know what's going to happen." Yet, malted milk drinks notwithstanding, Brock excusing himself from the encore, as well as being in keeping with his usual modest redirection of the audience's gaze, shows that there's no reason why the starship Hawkwind shouldn't power on into the void of golden light even if its longterm captain elects to spend more time at the group's Devon base during future live missions.

The wind of change has constantly blown through Hawkwind's line-up over the last 55 years. Notwithstanding a vocal minority of entitled naysayers, Yes, for example, have shown that slipping the moorings of having any original members at all can be done, with credibility and creativity still intact. Hawkwind's 2029 diamond anniversary tour surely beckons, although the exact personnel are to be confirmed.

**PAUL GING**

## JOHN MITCHELL

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | THE CAMDEN CLUB, LONDON |
| DATE | 06/04/2024 |
| SUPPORT | STORM DEVA |

The last time **John Mitchell** played solo in London, last February at the Islington Assembly Hall, it probably wasn't his best performance. Erroneously billed as 'An Evening With John Mitchell', it turned into a Lonely Robot show with a sub-standard band and attempts at humour sadly missing the mark. Tonight, however, in a show that really is 'An Evening With...', he wipes that evening from the memory banks with a show sparkling with side-splitting humour and musical adroitness.

Before he takes the stage, London duo **Storm Deva** offer an acoustic set with a selection of material from their enjoyable self-titled debut album. Led by Carollyn Eden's keyboards and classically pitched vocals, and a restrained prog-rocking astrophysicist Dr Stuart Clark on guitar, they warm the crowd up nicely, but when Eden announces they'll be performing with a full band later this year, *Prog* senses they're champing at the bit to let people see them in full flow.

Mitchell takes to the stage with his musical partner-in-crime for the evening, Jez Fielder, who has arranged a series of photos to be displayed on the screen behind the pair to prompt humorous anecdotes from Mitchell and help link the material. They start with two songs from It Bites: "That's continuity It Bites," jokes Mitchell, "not the People's Republic Of It Bites", a sly dig at Francis Dunnery's recent back catalogue dip. *Man In The Photograph* and a wonderful *Still Too Young To Remember* receive an ecstatic response from the sold-out crowd (including celeb pals Steven Wilson and David Cross), settling any nerves Mitchell may have had.

Acoustic gigs can be notoriously hit or miss. The renditions don't match the recorded originals for some, and the format allows for diversions die-hards may not always appreciate. However a dip into Joni Mitchell's *Big Yellow Taxi*, which is accompanied by a hilarious anecdote about a mistaken identity, and Cyndi Lauper's *Time After Time* are fresh and enjoyable. Mitchell performs a simply exquisite run-through of Frost* tunes before honouring his old pal John Wetton with a stunningly emotive take on *Battle Lines*.

Lonely Robot get a look in with *Lonely Robot* itself while singer-songwriter Leddra Chapman joins the pair for *Oubliette*, before a playful cover of A-ha's *Take On Me* and It Bites' *The Tall Ships* bring a glorious evening to a close and Mitchell and Fielder depart to deserved applause.

This is John Mitchell at his very best. He's worked hard at putting past troubles behind him and tonight we've seen a rich talent, a funny guy and an all-round decent bloke on display. His future's looking very bright. Starlit with stardust, one might say.

**JERRY EWING**

## ZOMBI

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | SCHUBAS TAVERN, CHICAGO, IL, USA |
| DATE | 05/04/2024 |

Schubas Tavern is an intimate venue in the Lakeview neighborhood that's built around the ideal connection between the performer and the audience. From time to time, that means nearly blowing said audience out the back door during a live performance. Such is the case when Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania duo Zombi take the stage tonight.

The synth-prog pair are in town to support their latest release, *Direct Inject*, their first full-length studio album in four years. The anticipation is readily apparent from the minute they take the stage and let loose. There's certainly a great deal of pent-up energy being unleashed onstage tonight.

A big sound in a small venue is far from unusual, but *Prog* can't help but marvel at the huge noise that fills this compact venue. Steve Moore (bass, synthesiser, saxophone) and Anthony Paterra (drums) are on opposite sides of the stage, but the space between them is completely filled.

The Genesis hit *Turn It On Again* is probably the last tune we expected to hear this evening, but it's fun to be surprised by its opening strains before Zombi downshift into their own material. From this point, it's all about the band in front of us and the original music they bring to the table. The duo do a great job of mixing the old with the new via a steady, consistent set. Fifteen songs pass quickly.

Zombi's grooves range from mid-tempo to slow; each and every beat and note are completely deliberate, as though they're being thought out mere milliseconds before they're played. This duo are present and very much in the moment. Their playing is hypnotic, casting a spell over all present. It's the kind of performance that was made to be witnessed live.

Moore's synthesiser runs would fit nicely into a John Carpenter horror film soundtrack. Rare is the day that low notes shake a room to its foundation, but these are easily measured on the Richter scale. Moore's bass guitar is equally raw and aggressive, aided by both his attack and the effects he is using. Meanwhile, Paterra channels a bit of his inner Phil Collins via a drum kit that would have worked perfectly on the *Seconds Out* album. This drummer isn't about fancy fills – such moments are well-placed to attain the maximum impact and it works brilliantly.

Even without excessive banter, Zombi know their audience are completely engaged. Fans greet every tune as a treat, a notion the band pick up via knowing smiles. Not even a technical glitch during the encore can mute the energy the duo have created. *Star Trek* fans are aware this gig is taking place on "First Contact Day", when humans learn they are not alone in the universe. It's completely appropriate, for tonight we're witnessing an otherworldly performance.

**CEDRIC HENDRIX**

# MYRKUR

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | ACADEMY 2, MANCHESTER |
| DATE | 09/04/2024 |
| SUPPORT | JONATHAN HULTÉN |

Mikkel Haastrup comes to the fore on the older songs.

Majestic and haunting.

Like some fey guardian peering from the eaves of a primaeval forest, **Myrkur** straddles different worlds. The one-woman project of Danish multi-instrumentalist Amalie Bruun was initially rooted in the Scandinavian black metal scene. If all you know about this scene is the murder and mayhem dramatised in the *Lords Of Chaos* book and subsequent film, you might be surprised to learn that acts like Ihsahn, Enslaved and Myrkur have taken that starting point and added their own richly progressive musical strokes. Myrkur in particular (the name can apply to both the artist and project) has carved out her own niche, mixing measured volume and aggression with complex layers and fragile, haunting folk themes. She's gradually moved ever further from that raw black metal base and her current album, 2023's *Spine*, is her most diverse and progressive yet.

She also likes to bring out interesting opening acts. Last time Myrkur played Manchester, Prog Award-winning cellist Jo Quail was both the main support and a part of Myrkur's live band. Tonight we get former Tribulation guitarist **Jonathan Hultén**, reinvented as a dark prog-folk solo artist. Dressed like an arboreal gothic cleric, he delivers intimate songs from his aptly titled debut album, *Chants From Another Place*, and choice cuttings from more recent reimagining *The Forest Sessions*. The delivery is marked by multitracked vocals that virtually provide Hultén with his own self-contained choir. He threads birdsong and other effects around an acoustic guitar and those ornately layered vocals but sounds just as powerful, if not more so, when things are stripped down to the vulnerable bare bones.

Backed by a full live band, Myrkur starts with *Bålfærd*, the slow-building intro and opener from *Spine*. This is followed by former single *Like Humans*, perhaps the closest thing to a pop song the project has yet produced. The chorus shimmers with glittering, singalong hooks but even here there's an undercurrent of menace and a brief swell of crashing drums and guitar. *Mothlike* rides an updraught of suitably fluttering synths and a euphoric yet subtly skittering dance beat.

By the time they move on to the sonorous piano chords and towering melodies of *My Blood Is Gold* — four songs in order — it's clear that they're playing *Spine* almost in its entirety. Those waiting for a wash of blood and fury have to wait but the album's ebb and flow lends itself to an engrossing first-half

The magnificently attired Jonathan Hultén impresses.

MARK LATHAM

Maja Shining: the perfect blend.

Amalie Bruun: heart, soul and spine of Myrkur.

performance. Written after Bruun became a mother, the collection is a heady mix of reflection and mythology that questions what it means to be human. *Spine* itself rides a series of building crescendos and *Valkyriernes Sang* is much heavier live than on record, but it's the second half of the set where they really start crunching through the gears.

Older songs *Dybt I Skoven* and *The Serpent* plunge back into Myrkur's past with guitarist Mikkel Haastrup coming more to the fore. Dark lullaby *Crown* is utterly majestic, and there's still time for a return to the meticulously constructed *Spine* material before Jonathan Hultén returns to provide acoustic guitar on a stunning rendition of trad folk ballad *House Carpenter*. They stay in folkier mode for the traditional Danish song *Bonden Og Kragen* and Myrkur's own beautifully haunting *Leaves Of Yggdrasil*. The dark balladeering side puts her in a similar field as contemporaries like AA Williams and Chelsea Wolfe, with a dash of Kate Bush quirkiness thrown in just for good measure.

The singer's crystalline vocals are quite incredible throughout, especially when the music lulls to give them space, or they play off the impressive backing vocals of bassist and synth player Maja Shining. While not as visually captivating as a collective like Heilung, there's a feeling of ritual to the performance, especially as the hypnotic chants of *Ulvinde* and the funereal grace of *Death Of Days* bring things to a dramatic conclusion. It's a breathtaking finale to a remarkable performance from a unique and fearlessly inventive artist. Wander once into her domain and you might never come back.

**PAUL TRAVERS**

**"A remarkable performance from a unique and fearlessly inventive artist."**

Myrkur brings the Scandinavian forest to Manchester.

## SPRIGGAN MIST

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | THE 1865, SOUTHAMPTON |
| DATE | 24/03/2024 |
| SUPPORT | THE WOOD DEMONS |

Few bands would enlist a world-champion kickboxer to lead their pre-gig routine, but it's all part of Spriggan Mist's unique approach. As the headliners limber up backstage with Kloe Ward, it's up to **The Wood Demons** to warm up the audience. Theirs is an understated psychedelic vibe, hinting at Caravan and Curved Air through the dominant, flowing violin runs of the ever-animate, expressive Naomi Belshaw.

Compelling animations heighten the intensity of their long, thoughtful pieces. Tonight, they debut new numbers, including *Underground Rivers* and a section of Rick Startin's keyboard-led *Nothing Between Us And Heaven*. Old favourites such as *Arithmomania* and *Angels Of Peckham Rye* also get an airing. Fine musicians they all are, but neither Startin nor guitarist Simon Carbery quite pack the requisite vocal punch to convey their lyrical stories.

There are no such issues with **Spriggan Mist**. Singer Fay Brotherhood's antlered headdress contains more foliage than the nearby New Forest and is as magnificent as her powerful, soaring, diamond-cut voice. Her spirited pagan queen persona is integral to the experience, which is as musically indefinable as it is visually astounding.

Pulsating opener *Isambard The Mechanical Dragon* signals the musical direction of travel. Shades of Horslips and Mike Oldfield inform the folkish element of their huge, multifaceted sound. *Lair Of Isambard* gallops along merrily, its foot-tapping tempo driven by ever-smiling drummer Colin Garratt while *Resurrection* presents a sharper metal edge.

New song *When Stars Collide* features close interplay between bassist Baz Cilia and his multi-instrumentalist wife Maxine, whose keytar and saxophone passages bring extra textures and contrasts to the party.

*Soul Retriever* is another stunner on which Baz takes lead vocals, leading a mid-song singalong. Maxine slays it with her intricate lead guitar work. She shares the spotlight throughout with the equally fluid guitarist Neil Wighton on *Spell Maker* from debut album *The Portal*.

Just when *Prog* thinks it couldn't get any weirder, *Kintbury Witch* – about the illegal destruction of bat roosts in churches – includes an incantation using animal skulls, while musically, Maxine unleashes another scorching guitar solo. She then momentarily switches to recorder for another new song, *Ianatores Terestres*, which blends all the band's key elements including a killer riff, two lead guitars and plenty of light and shade.

For the traditional *Spriggan Dance* and *Faery Queen* encores, they're joined by band mascot Sebastian the Spriggan – the "well-hard faery" – and young Faye Thompson, the anointed Faery Messenger. Bonkers, bedazzling and brilliant, the Mist shouldn't be missed!

**ALISON REIJMAN**

Take a Bow

## SOFT MACHINE

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | RONNIE SCOTT'S JAZZ CLUB, LONDON |
| DATE | 10/04/2024 |

In an onstage announcement, Soft Machine guitarist John Etheridge dedicates tonight's concert to drummer John Marshall, who first played in the Softs in 1972 and died in 2023, proclaiming him as one of the best drummers of the second half of the 20th century. No pressure, then, for his replacement, Israeli composer and percussionist Asaf Sirkis, whom Etheridge wryly informs us was chosen because he "told the best jokes". But on a more serious matter, Sirkis has played with guitarists as widely spaced on the musical spectrum as John Abercrombie and Wilko Johnson, and his style encompasses formidable jazz chops and rock propulsion. He's partnered in the rhythm section by relative newcomer and In Cahoots alumnus Fred Baker's supple, sonorous bass.

Since their inception in 1966, Soft Machine's course has been uniquely meandering, involving more than 50 musicians in the band's various incarnations and spin-off groups, and tonight Etheridge's acknowledgment of some who have passed on or passed away is reflected in a set that's typically sourced from all eras. They start with the solemn drama of Hugh Hopper's *Facelift* from *Third*, which contrasts with an affectionate version of Kevin Ayers' bass-led instrumental tune *Joy Of A Toy*, from the band's 1968 debut album. There's a lyrical reworking of Hopper's *Kings & Queens*, with Theo Travis's flute to the fore, and his composition *The Visitor At The Window*, from 2023's welcome return *Other Doors*, is impressionistic with a gentle jazz theme emerging towards the close.

This latest line-up does the band's legacy proud and they can really pump out the energy. Take, for example, *Burden Of Proof*, where Etheridge and Travis, on sax, become engaged in a thrilling, intense duel. The guitarist announces *The Tale Of Taliesin*, as written by "Sir Karl Jenkins", and in the fast section, he plays at such hyper velocity, legs twitching, feet stamping, it feels like he's in danger of spontaneous combustion.

This far-ranging approach works so well because Soft Machine are essentially a quartet of jazzers who love all the material, so give them a tune to work with and they're guaranteed to do a good job. The closing medley starts with *10:30 Returns To The Bedroom*. Sirkis begins his drum solo by quoting Robert Wyatt's original before achieving a dazzling speed and subtlety. The set concludes with *Hazard Profile Part 1* from 1975 album *Bundles*, which originally showcased guitarist Allan Holdsworth, and at the beginning of his solo, Etheridge employs some whammy bar and string bending in homage to the former guitarist's trademark style. Fifty-eight years down the line, Soft Machine are just as good as they ever were – just a bit different, that's all.

**MIKE BARNES**

# KYROS

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | OSLO HACKNEY, LONDON |
| DATE | 25/04/2024 |
| SUPPORT | AZURE, LEONI JANE KENNEDY |

Well, this is a turn-up for the books. We're at a prog gig (obviously) not exclusively populated by people of, er, (cough) a certain age. And there's an outbreak of dancing as **Kyros** rattle their way through a downright funky *Ghosts Of You* at the end of their set. Within minutes, that's actually turned into a conga that snakes its way around the venue as the party atmosphere continues.

Leoni Jane Kennedy: remember her name.

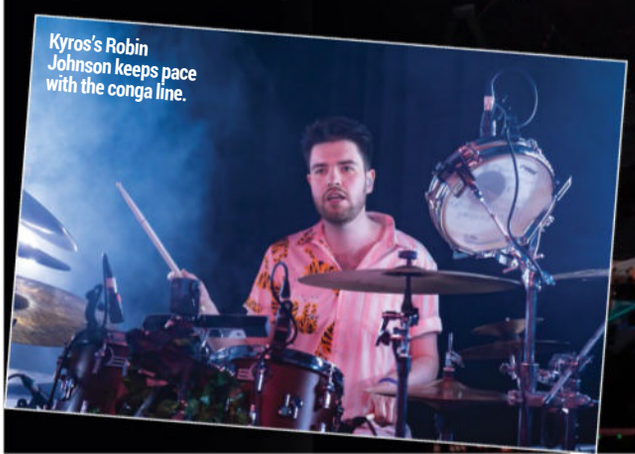
Azure: mightily impressive.

It's a pleasing, if somewhat surprising, end to a night that highlights three young, up-and-coming UK artists of various proggish hues. All credit should go to the London Prog Gigs Facebook group, who are turning into a real bastion of support to bands who often pass under the radar of bigger promoters, and while the group's refreshing approach to inclusivity may not always appeal to the more centric fan, it makes for some great bills.

**Leoni Jane Kennedy** is a fine example. Some prog fans may have seen her playing guitar for The Anchoress, but the exposure garnered on a night like this can be invaluable for a musician at this level. Assured and with a striking guitar technique, Kennedy makes the most of her chance, her soaring voice impressing on a fine cover of Rush's *Tears* and the powerfully emotive *Ammunition*. Remember the name, you'll be hearing it a lot more from now on.

Despite packing an almighty musical punch, it would be wrong to label Brighton-based prog quintet **Azure** as a prog metal band. Sure, vocalist and guitarist Christopher Sampson's powerful roar may hit Dream Theater-like heights, but there's a more measured sense of musicality to the likes of *A Sailor Will Learn* and *Spark Madrigal*, and the meaty *Weight Of The Blade* from their upcoming concept album *Fym*. *Prog* has been lucky enough to hear the new album, the band's third, and can state it's a massively impressive affair. Like Kennedy before them, and the headliners to come, Azure are rapturously received.

**Kyros** aren't mucking around either. Surrounded by blazing lights and clad in colourful stage outfits – singer and keyboardist Shelby Logan Warne is wearing a glittery cape that would make Rick Wakeman green with envy – their opening salvo of *Showtime*, a pulsating *Esoterica* and *Illusions Inside* are an assault on the senses. Their slick combination of prog and 80s synthpop goes a long way to highlighting what makes Kyros such an attractive proposition and is also a perfect example of how young bands are taking progressive music and transforming it into new and intriguing forms. Even 10 years ago you'd probably have been laughed out of the room for


Kyros's Robin Johnson keeps pace with the conga line.

Kyros get the party started... and keep it going!

WILL IRELAND

Charlie Cawood gets in the groove.

Joey Frevola is as loud as his shirt.

Have keytar, will travel.

daring to suggest a mix of 80s pop and prog rock. And yet here we are. And it's terrific!

That's not to say that Kyros can't prog it out with the best of them. Both *The Lamb, The Badger & The Bee* from 2016's *Vox Humana* and a shortened *Time, Tension & Intervention*, which dips back to the *Synaesthesia* album that started everything in 2014, show a band who know their prog chops. Equally, you don't get a musician of Charlie Cawood's calibre joining your band unless you know what you're doing musically. Although it should also be noted that guitarist Joey Frevola and drummer Robin Johnson are hardly slouches in the musical department either.

Visually Warne is the undoubted star of the show though, prowling the stage with keytar in hand, or rocking her banks of keyboards while simultaneously hitting all the right notes. A cheerleader for modern-day progressive rock, no less. Swathes of melodic keyboards herald the arrival of *Rumour* from 2020's *Celexa Dreams* and the bouncing *The End In Mind* ends the set proper on a high note, garnering raucous applause.

And before you know it, everyone's up and dancing for *Ghosts Of You*. What a top night.

**JERRY EWING**

**"Shelby Logan Warne is the star of the show, prowling the stage with keytar in hand. A cheerleader for modern-day progressive rock, no less."**

## CHELSEA WOLFE

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | HEAVEN, LONDON |
| DATE | 02/04/2024 |
| SUPPORT | MAUD THE MOTH |

Chambered within old brick arches, Heaven resembles more of an ancient tomb than the setting for one of London's most vibrant LGBTQ+ nightclubs, its shadowy structure befitting the ever-mysterious **Chelsea Wolfe**, who is here to showcase her best-received album to date, *She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She*. Excluding her outings as part of Converge's *Bloodmoon*, it's the Californian singer-songwriter's first UK performance in nearly six years and it's been a highly-anticipated wait.

But first, adding to the haunted atmosphere is **Maud The Moth**, who bestows classical piano ballads sprinkled with soundbites of birdsong, a Kate Bush-style whimsy and melodies so ethereal it feels as though she might summon a legion of sprites to join her at any minute. Maud (aka Amaya López-Carromero) succeeds in instilling mass hypnosis before passing the baton to Wolfe, whose opener *Whispers In The Echo Chamber* introduces a nocturnal melody that slowly escalates into tantruming percussion and a face-scrunching guitar riff. Though slightly muffled by the volume of her band, Wolfe weaves her vocals through the noise, buoying the storm instead of retreating under it, her siren-esque timbre as comforting as it is unearthly.

As she moves through new songs *Everything Turns Blue* and *House Of Self-Undoing*, their industrial elements are heightened in the underground space, as woozy bass lines pulse under twinkling navy lights, and drums gallop over peculiar scratches of intricate guitar, conjuring visions of dystopian sci-fi thrillers. Older songs, including *Pain Is Beauty*'s *Feral Love*, are similarly padded-out, with drums that build into an intensely ritualistic rhythm, climaxed by a series of wails as Wolfe's voice sweeps upward to bewitchingly high peaks.

More familiar tracks make an appearance, including *Hiss Spun*'s *16 Psyche*, but it's the newer offerings that really make their mark tonight, with *Place In The Sun* showing Wolfe at her most gorgeously cinematic.

While each song is executed with little motion, Wolfe proves that less really is more, with her physical subtleties either gently caressing the air, or drifting into corners like a black-gowned apparition all adding to her enigmatic presence. Towards the latter end of the evening with the arrival of the fan favourite *Flatlands*, things take a more personal turn. The stripped-back arrangements of acoustic-led *The Liminal* and unplanned encore of *Be All Things* emphasise the powerful beauty of Wolfe's voice to an eerily silent audience. As she leaves the stage, it's an abrupt awakening to reality. It feels as though, for the last couple of hours, we were transported to somewhere far better, and far more magical entirely.

**LIZ SCARLETT**

# WINTER'S END

| | |
|---|---|
| VENUE | THE DRILL HALL, CHEPSTOW |
| DATE | 12/04/2024-14/04/2024 |

Beatrix Players greet the crowd.

Many times, at both Winter's and Summer's End festivals, *Prog* has commented about being introduced to bands from beyond the UK who wouldn't necessarily get the chance to play here, which goes a long way to separating these weekend events from others that have sprung up more recently. At this year's Winter's End, however, the focus seems to be on younger acts, a great move by the organisers. Like at many of the boutique events on the UK's prog calendar, attendees (and reviewers) may no longer be in their first flushes of youth, but there are plenty of youngsters onstage delighting the crowd as much as some of the more established performers this weekend, showing there's a lot of youthful vigour to be found with the prog world. A delight to see.

Youngest of all is the bump carried by **Beatrix Players** leader Amy Birks, who will understandably be taking some time off soon to have her baby. Not that this visibly affects her performance with the new-look Players, who feature John Hackett on flute and Oliver Day on guitar, as they get Friday evening's proceedings up and running. Birks possesses a delight of a voice, and from opener *Snowflakes* to the climactic *What Do You Say* is in total command of band, stage and audience. Today, they're a very different group from the one that released *Magnified*, but they still enchant and enrich the listener.

The juxtaposition of Beatrix Players' nuance and **The Fierce & The Dead**'s full-throttle attack is a shock to the system for some, but the band, who have been performing in support of their excellent *News From The Invisible World* album for some time now, are very much a well-oiled machine. While the new vocal-led TFATD are a grand proposition, not everyone is as in tune as Kev Feazey's vocals, but despite the odd evident detractor, the band are their usual amiable selves and are aided and abetted by touring keyboard player and vocalist Tom Hunt, who helps up the prog quota within the band's rich mix of post-rock, post-punk and post-metal.

The set features all of *News From The Invisible World*, the first four songs in order, which include the excellent singles *Golden Thread* and *Photogenic Love*, early cuts like *Magnet* and *Flint* and the excellent *Truck* and *1991* from 2018's majestic *The Euphoric*. Like all great bands who appeal to those who favour more intelligent, thought-provoking music, TFATD are unafraid to take risks, which makes for a fantastic listening experience. A great choice of headliner for the first night.

Saturday's line-up showcases the diversity and quality of modern prog, spanning the generations from brand-new artists alongside a rejuvenated early-80s band. The future of progressive rock needs new artists and open-minded audiences. *Prog* editor Jerry Ewing was invited to introduce **Zopp**, the 'Prog Presents' band, and emphasised this fact by describing young bands playing thought-provoking music as the "lifeblood of modern progressive music", adding: "They put a smile on my face when I heard them for the first time."

> **"Solstice joyously play groove-laden songs that span their career; it's impossible not to like them in concert."**

Zopp, led by talented keyboardist Ryan Stevenson, then rips into the vibrant *You*. He and his bandmate Richard Lucas create a captivating synthesis of organ, electric guitar and even Mellotron, skating imperiously on the icy cool bass of Ashley Raynor and Andrea Moneta's titanic drums. Their fresh blend of Canterbury-infused rock doesn't take long to intoxicate the crowd, which in turn impels organiser Stephen Lambe to allow them an overrun. Thus they roll out a fizzing *Toxicity*, which brings smiles to many faces.

CHRIS WALKDEN

Solstice: groove is in their hearts.

The Fierce & The Dead rock out.

Prog's own pick, Zopp.

The ambitious Dominic Sanderson.

Yesterdays having some fun.

Prior to this, opening act **Dominic Sanderson** and band underline the emphasis on youth, albeit drawing deeply from prog heritage, mixing darkness and light in their own style. Not all songs hit the spot, but there's ambition in their rawness. Inevitably, Mellotron embellishes the imaginative epic finale, *Like Shards Of Glass*. Sanderson's darkly ornate music is received well — promising for only a second-ever gig.

Hungarian band **Yesterdays** impress with an expansive melodic rock set, harking back to the early 70s. When a band deploy a flute (and yep, *another* Mellotron!) they can't go wrong at a prog festival. Pleasingly, Stéphanie Semeniuc sings passionately in Hungarian; Bogáti-Bokor Ákos excels on guitars, particularly the acoustic solo *If Ever*, and the wah-wah 'conversation' with Emese Fazekas's flute. The lyrical, extended *Seven* (sung in English) wins the hearts of Winter's End — an outstanding end to their set.

The atmosphere changes considerably with the foreboding *Time Travel In Texas* signalling the entrance of **Tim Bowness**, singing solo and No-Man material. Prowling the stage, he oozes cool charisma amid the fury created by Butterfly Mind (aka the band Rain, plus The Fierce & The Dead's mercurial Matt Stevens). Stevens, who expends more energy sitting than many do standing, wrestles his guitar like an alligator, contorting myriad amazing sounds. Glistening guitars carry *All The Blue Changes* into a rising wall of sound built by the stellar ex-IQ/Frost* rhythm section, John Jowitt and Andy Edwards. Bowness's laconic humour impels him to remark that for a prog festival they disappointingly score "Only one on the Prog-O-Meter!" (A view bizarrely shared later by two disgruntled punters in the toilets, presumably scandalised that iconoclast Bowness has chosen to play without a Mellotron!).

A crystalline *Wherever There Is Light* showcases Bowness's translucent vocals, followed by the furiously percussive *The Warm-Up Man Forever*. Lush versions of *Sing To Me* and *Rainmark* precede the viscerally rhythmic *Sweetheart Raw*. Bowness deftly switches from beautifully fragile to more spiky tones within alternately gorgeous or frightening *Butterly Mind* soundscapes. They leave Winter's End minds completely blown. They may be low on the 'Prog-O-Meter', but they're also definitely *very* high on the 'Brilliant-Gig-O-Meter'!

Tim Bowness goes into the light.

Trilogy: rarely seen, always enjoyed.

**Solstice**'s all-consuming wave of positivity finishes Saturday. Joyously playing groove-laden songs that span their career, it's impossible not to like them in concert. The only original member left, Andy Glass, has assembled an exciting band, including skilled keyboardist Steven McDaniel. The sweet younger vocals of Jess Holland and Ebony Buckle have crucially reinvigorated Solstice. Just watching their effervescence onstage is exhausting but infectious. The bouncy prog funk of *Wongle No.9* is followed by fiddle player Jenny Newman leading a merry folk dance in *Mount Ephraim*. The 40th anniversary of debut album *Silent Dance* is celebrated superbly with *Earthsong* and *Cheyenne*, while *Bulbul Tarang* weaves an exotic spell in the room, and no Solstice gig would be complete without the thrill of the classic *Sacred Run*. Guitar wizard Glass nimbly reels out cascading runs over a torrent of sound created by a superbly tight band. It's a glorious way to finish a great day showcasing progressive rock across the generations.

Glen Brielle's Hugh Carter adds some wind.

**Glen Brielle** get things underway on Sunday in what is now a traditional low-key manner. However, there are two people onstage. Is one Glen and the other Brielle? Neither, it seems. It's the name chosen by Abel Ganz founding member Hugh Carter, who is accompanied by his former Ganz collaborator Malcolm McNiven on guitar. Carter's vocals are certainly an acquired taste, but given the medical travails he's endured in recent years, that can certainly be forgiven. The duo are received more than warmly.

It's the first time this writer has seen **Trilogy** since 1984. Same, quite possibly, for many people in the audience, too. Opening songs *A Legion In Morocco* and *Necrosleep* seem to suffer from sound gremlins with keyboards going awry, but soon enough the band transport everyone back to those 80s gigs. Bassist/vocalist Mark Bloxsidge acts as compere, leaving keyboardist/guitarist and vocalist Paul Dennis to wrestle with his multi-instruments, while drummer Nik Szymanek is a revelation behind the kit, attacking it with a fury of a man a third his age. *Arctic Life* is a blast of pure nostalgia and while the closing Rush medley may seem a tad superfluous (as if anyone needs reminding who the band's main influence are!), it guarantees a good time is had by all. The man in front of *Prog* raises his arms aloft in a show of ecstatic celebration.

Rrröööaaarrr! Here come **HeKz**, who, compared with Glen Brielle and Trilogy, have all the subtlety of a brick to the face! That's not to say they're not good. On the back of recent album *Terra Nova*, by far and away the band's best to date, they're a far different proposition to the last time they played here. Admittedly Matt Young still wants to be Steve Harris and Bruce Dickinson rolled into one, but star of the show is violinist Irina Markevich, who turns in one of the performances of the weekend, elevating the band beyond the bog-standard prog metal band they were in danger of turning into, and into a band whose sound is textured and nuanced, as well as being rockingly good fun.

We've reviewed **Kyros** at their London show elsewhere this issue (see p106), and suffice to say they're great fun tonight and go down a storm. So onward to headliner **Oliver Wakeman**, who is premiering music from the upcoming *Anam Cara* as well as some material from the Yes mini-album *From A Page*. Before that, however, the band open with a ripping *Moneyfacturing* from Wakeman and Gordon Giltrap's excellent 2013 *Ravens & Lullabies* album, and from the off it's apparent what an inspired choice Hayley Griffiths is as vocalist. She may be slight in stature and unerringly polite, but she rocks out superbly on the opener, taking full command of the stage. Scott Higham is his usual powerhouse of a drummer, linking well with Magenta's Dan Nelson, while Oliver Day exudes taste.

HeKz furiously fiddling.

The affable Wakeman is, of course, the star of the show, his richly majestic keyboard sounds showing that while he's certainly a chip off the old block, he's also very much his own man, too. This is evident as he leads his crack troops through a selection of material from *Jabberwocky*, *Mother's Ruin*, *Three Ages Of Magick* and more. The new *Anam Cara* material offers a balladic, celtic vibe which allows Griffiths, who was previously a performer in *Riverdance*, to display yet another impressive side to her vocal capacity.

When Wakeman finally introduces Yes's *Words On A Page* material, *Prog* senses from the crowd's reaction that this is what many have really been waiting for — and the band perform all four songs from the album that wasn't, but really should have been. On record it's certainly the best post-*Talk* Yes music that these ears have heard, with Griffiths's perfectly-pitched voice doing it absolute justice. After which *Jabberwocky*'s jaunty and good-natured *Coming To Town* sends everyone out into the night air with a huge smile on their faces. A defining triumph of a set, and crowning glory of another great weekend.

**JERRY EWING/LEO TRIMMING**

**"Oliver Wakeman is the star of the show, his richly majestic keyboard sounds showing that while he's certainly a chip off the old block, he's also very much his own man, too."**

Hayley Griffiths and Oliver Wakeman round off the festival.

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PRESS/LANE DORSEY

# KEVIN COMEAU (CROWN LANDS)

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon.**

**Where's home?**
Uxbridge, Ontario: the Trail Capital of Canada.

**Your earliest memory of prog?**
I uploaded my uncle's Rush albums onto my iPod Nano when I was 14. The first album I listened to was *A Farewell To Kings*. *Xanadu* was the first time I heard Taurus pedals, tubular bells, odd time signatures, Minimoogs. It blasted the prog doors open for me.

**What was the first prog album you bought?**
As a kid, the only spot I could find records was a flea market in my hometown. I'd go every Sunday with my dad. The first album I bought was *Animals* by Pink Floyd. And then I bought a first pressing of *Hemispheres* on red vinyl.

**And the latest?**
Brass Camel's debut album, *Brass [left]*. They're a very cool prog band from British Columbia, Canada with hints of fusion and funk.

**Your first prog gig?**
The first concert I ever saw was The Smashing Pumpkins at Massey Hall [in Toronto] in 2008. I always felt the Pumpkins pulled from the prog greats in all the right ways. Jimmy Chamberlin is one of my favourite drummers, it was incredible to see him do his thing live.

**And the most recent?**
I had the pleasure of seeing Rick Wakeman perform solo in Albany, NY this past March. He's incredible. He will always be my favourite keyboard player.

MARGARET NORTON/NBCU PHOTO BANK/NBCUNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES

Kevin invites you to *Come On Over* for some Shania Twain!

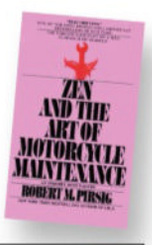
**What's the best prog show you ever saw?**
Rush's final show in Toronto in 2015. I caught both nights but the second night they played *Losing It* [from *Signals*] for the first time. The energy in the room was incredible! It was a poignant moment and one I'm glad I caught.

**Your latest prog discovery?**
The Chronicles Of Father Robin have captured my imagination lately. Really cool Norwegian supergroup with members from Wobbler – a Jethro Tull-esque mystical folk-prog vibe with something else I can't quite put into words. Highly recommended.

**Guilty musical pleasure?**
I love Shania Twain's [monster-hit 1997 album] *Come On Over*. Nineties country was filled with incredible guitar playing and tones by Brent Mason and Dann Huff. I love Mutt Lange's production, too.

**Outside of music, what are you into?**
I'm obsessed with coffee. Whenever we're on tour I try to find the most interesting locally roasted beans. I love a good natural Ethiopian coffee. I like to do pour overs with my V60 [coffee dripper] at home and on the road I use my Aeropress.

**Got a book recommendation for us?**
*Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance* [right] by Robert M Pirsig. It's a special book for so many reasons.




> When my wife sang every word to *The Spirit Of Radio*, I knew right then she was the one.

**Ever had a prog-related date?**
On one of the first dates I went on with my wife, we showed each other our favourite records. One of mine was [Rush's] *Exit Stage Left*. When *The Spirit Of Radio* came on my wife sang every word. I knew right then that she was the one.

**Who's your prog hero?**
Rick Wakeman. If Rick is anything, he is uncompromising. His use of the Minimoog is permanently etched on my brain!

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

The "uncompromising" hero, Rick Wakeman.

**What's the most important piece of prog music?**
Easily *Close To The Edge* by Yes. Still the greatest prog album of all time for me.

**Which prog muso would you most like to work with?**
I played with Alex Lifeson onstage at Massey Hall a couple of years ago, for a charity gig, and we have stayed in touch. I'd love to work on some music with him.

**What prog album gets you in a good mood?**
*Apostrophe* by Frank Zappa! I love Zappa's humour and this record showcases it perfectly. It's one of our go-to albums to listen to in the van on tour as well.

**What's your favourite prog album cover?**
It has to be *In The Court Of The Crimson King*. There are some incredible covers out there, but none as iconic in my opinion.

**And what are you up to at the moment?**
We're finishing up an instrumental record with Terry Brown and David Barrett, and we have another one we've been recording with Justin Meli. We're writing a new, full-length Crown Lands record too, which picks up from [last record] *Fearless*. We have about 20 demos – it's been a productive recording year for us and we're just getting started!

*See www.crownlandsmusic.com for more information.*

56 bands

# NENE VALLEY ROCK FESTIVAL

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**Hekz**

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All stages in marquees
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## Saturday

### The Castle & Campsite

Camp near music arena
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## Sunday

Caravan
SOLSTICE
**Doris Brendel**
**Grace**
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**Genius The Fool**
**The Tirith**

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MARTIN TURNER EX WISHBONE ASH
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**Chris Bevington Organisation**
**Treebeard**
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FRIDAY 26 JULY 2024

## THE MIDNIGHT

PLINI VOLA ICHIKA NITO

CASKETS THROWN EARTHSIDE VOWER

UNPEOPLE THE INTERSPHERE CESTRA GIANT WALKER

MASTERCLASSES | JAY POSTONES PLINI RABEA MASSAAD

SATURDAY 27 JULY 2024

## TESSERACT

DIRTY LOOPS CAR BOMB HEART OF A COWARD

CONJURER THE FALL OF TROY ITHACA GRAPHIC NATURE

HAIL THE SUN SEETHING AKIRA KYROS TRIBE OF GHOSTS

MASTERCLASSES | ADAM JANZI EINAR SOLBERG HENRIK LINDER

SUNDAY 28 JULY 2024

## LEPROUS

REAL-TIME SONG REQUEST SET

ACT TBA SUNGAZER HUMANITY'S LAST BREATH

OXYMORRONS BLOOD COMMAND SIAMESE ASHEN

THE OMNIFIC FUTURE STATIC ADHARMA ATHEANA

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